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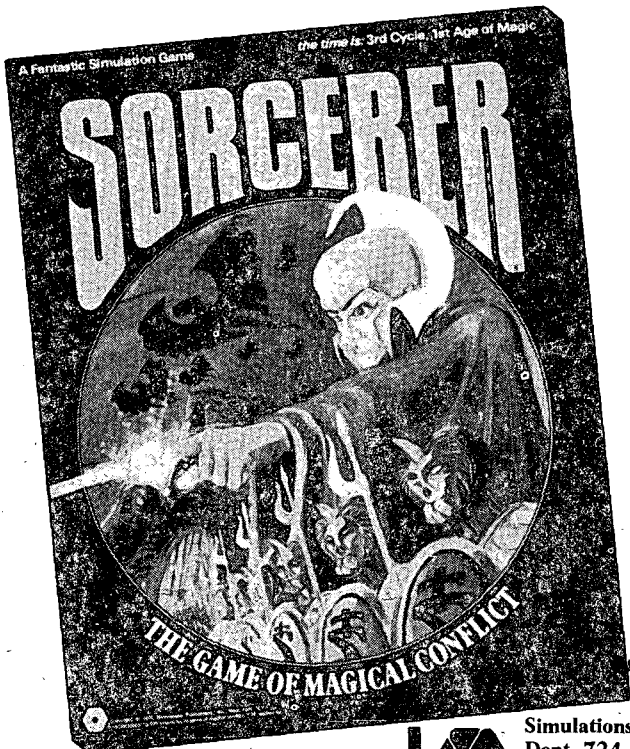

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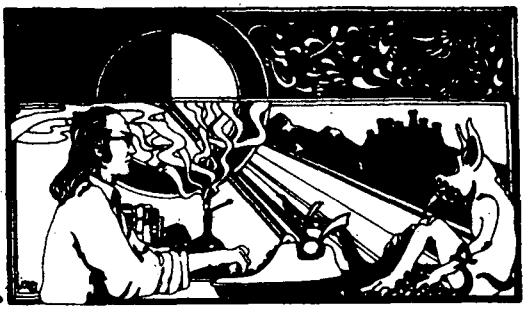
TED WHITE

editorial



THOMAS BURNETT SWANN, 1928–1976: In 1974 we published in these pages Thomas Burnett Swann's "Will-O-The-Whisp," a haunting novel of magic in post-Elizabethian England. At that time (in our September, 1974, issue) I described in my editorial how I first encountered the man's work and the lasting impression it made upon me. "Will-O-The-Wisp" was the first work by Swann to appear in FANTASTIC, despite my long-standing desire to publish him here; we would have published an earlier novel but for technical difficulties (a book publisher had purchased pre-publication serial rights—an unusual procedure—and refused to allow magazine serialization). Last year he sent me a second novel which I had hoped to have published by now, but which—at 45,000 words—is a bit too long for one issue and can't be serialized with our present quarterly schedule. I hope you'll see it in these pages within a few issues, however.

In any case, it was with considerable shock that I learned that Thomas Burnett Swann had died this spring, during what appeared to be the renaisance of his career. It was surely an untimely occurance, and a blow to those many of us who have prized his work.

Bob Roehm sent me a copy of his obituary (published as a supplement to *Fosfax* #29), and I'd like to quote portions of it here:

"Thomas Burnett Swann died May 5, 1976, of cancer at his parents' home in Winter Haven, Florida. He was 47 years old.

"Swann was born October 12, 1928, in Florida. He was fascinated as a child by the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs and, later, *Planet Stories* and *Weird Tales*. Oddly, however, these early loves did not influence his later fiction to a noticeable degree.

"He attended Duke University and the University of Tennessee, and he received his doctorate from the University of Florida. He taught English literature for several years at Wesleyan College in Georgia and Florida Atlantic University, but he gave up his academic career in the early sixties in favor of full-time writing.

"Swann's first published work was poetry, beginning in the early fifties while he was in the Navy; four collections of his verse were published. He also wrote several critical and biographical studies on such literary figures as A.A. Milne, Ernest Dowson and Christina Rossetti.

"In 1958 Swann's first fantasy, 'Winged Victory,' was published in *Fantastic Universe*, although he did not begin to sell regularly until the 1960's when the British *Science Fantasy* under the editorship of Ted Carnell became his main market. His first novel, *Day of the Minotaur*, was published by Donald Wollheim at Ace Books in 1966 to a favorable reception and a Hugo nomination. Ace sub-

(cont. on page 123)

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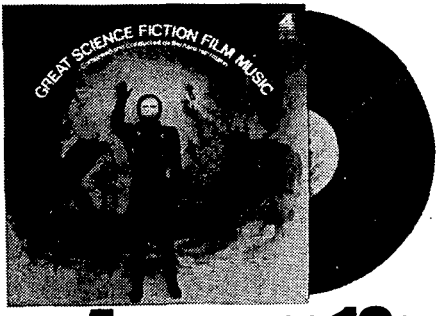

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Fred Saberhagen, whose science fiction has been popular for more than a decade, here turns his hand to a reexamination of the legends of Crete and—

THE WHITE BULL

FRED SABERHAGEN

He was up on the high ridge, watching the gulls ride in from over the bright sea on their motionless wings, to be borne upward as if by magic, effortlessly, when the sundazzled landscape began to rise beneath them. Thus he was probably one of the first to sight the black-sailed ship coming in to port.

Standing, he raised a calloused hand to brush aside his grizzled hair and shade his eyes. The vessel had the look of the craft that usually came from Athens. But those sails . . .

He picked up and threw over his shoulder the cloak with which he had padded rock into a comfortable chair. It was time he came down from the high ridge anyway. King Minos and some of Minos' servitors were shrewd, and perhaps it would be wiser not to watch the birds too openly or too long.

When he had picked his way down, the harbor surrounded him with its noise and activity, its usual busy mixture of naval ships and cargo vessels, unloading and being worked on and taking on new cargo. On Execution Dock the sun-dried carcasses of pirates, looking like poor statues, shriveled atop tall poles in the bright sun. On the wharf where the black-sailed ship now moored, a small crowd had gathered and a dispute of some kind was going on. A bright-painted wagon, pulled by two white horses, had come down as scheduled from the House of the Double Axe to meet the Athenian ship, but none of the wagon's intended riders were getting into it as yet.

They stood on the wharf, fourteen youths and maids in a more or less compact group, wearing good clothes that seemed to have been deliberately torn and dirtied. Their faces were smeared with soot and ashes as if for mourning, and most of them looked somewhat the worse for wine. They were arguing with a couple of minor officials of the House, who had come down with the wagon and a small honor guard of soldiery. It was not the argument that drew the man from the high ridge ever closer, however, but the sight of one who stood in the front of the Athenian group, half a head taller than anyone around him . . .

He pushed his way in through the little crowd, a gray middle-aged man with the heavy hands of an artisan and wearing heavy gold and silver ornaments on his fine white loincloth. A soldier looked round resentfully as a hard hand pushed on his shoulder, then closed his mouth and stepped

Illustrated by Steve Fabian

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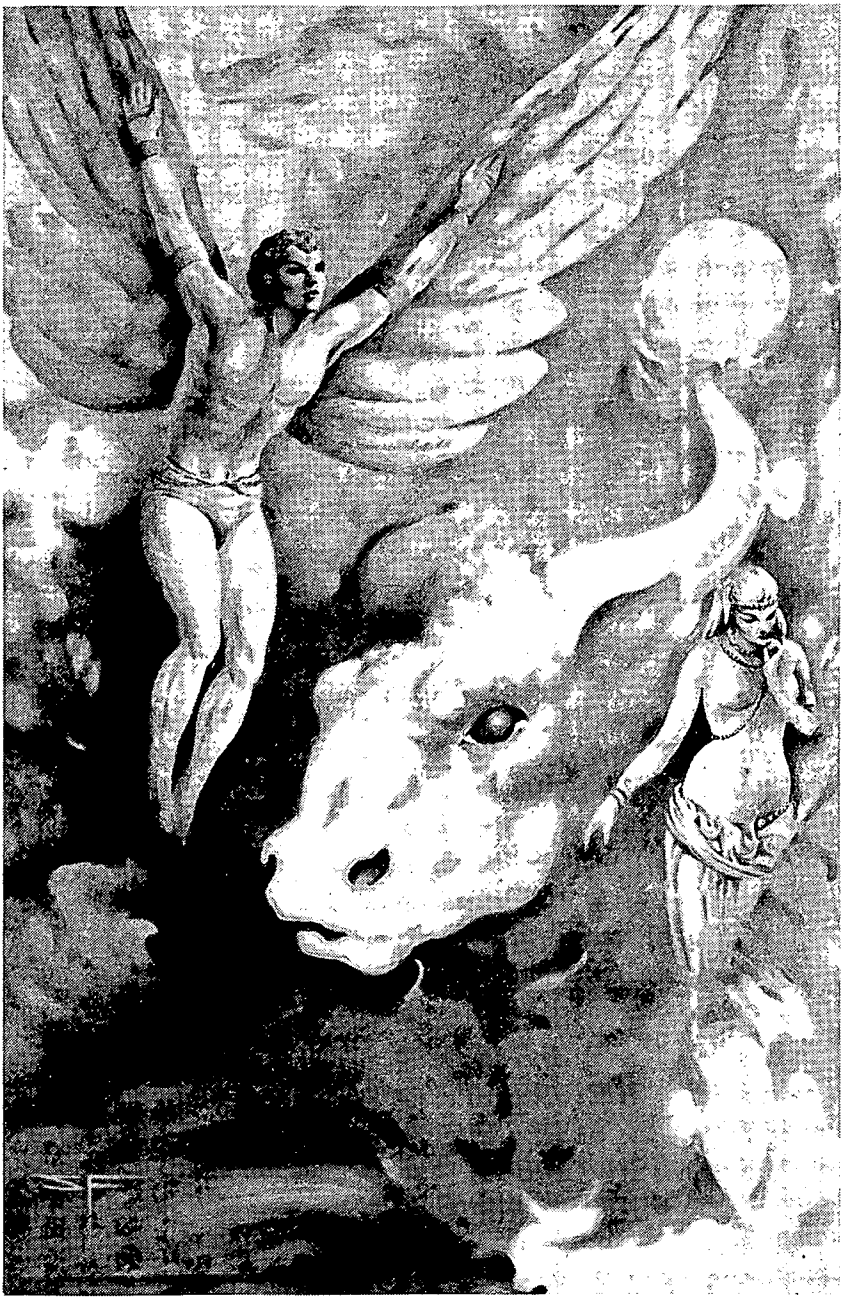

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aside.

"Prince Theseus." The old workman's hands went out in a gesture of deferential greeting. "I rejoice that the gods have brought you safe again before my eyes. How goes it with your royal father?"

The tall young man swung his eyes around and brought them rather slowly into focus. Some of the sullen anger left his begrimed face. "Daedalus." A nod gave back unforced respect, became almost a bow as the strong body threatened to overbalance. "King Aegeus does well enough."

"I saw the black sails, Prince, and feared they might bear news of tragedy."

"All m'family in Athens are healthy as war horses, Daedalus. Or were when we sailed. The mourning is for ourselves. For our approaching . . ." Theseus groped hopelessly for a word.

"Immolation," cheerfully supplied one of the other young men in ashes.

"That's it." The Prince smiled faintly. "So you may tell these officers that we wear what we please to our own welcome." His dulled black eyes roamed up the stair-steps of the harbor town's white houses and warehouses and whorehouses, to an outlying flank of the House of the Double Axe which was just visible amid a grove of cedars at the top of the first ridge. "Where is the school?"

"Not far beyond the portion of the House you see. Say an hour's walk." Daedalus observed the younger man with sympathy. "So, you find the prospect of a student's life in Crete not much to your liking." Around them the other branches of the argument between Cretan officials and newcomers had ceased; all were attending to the dialogue.

"Four years, Daedalus." The princely cheeks, one whitened with an old sword-scar, puffed out in a winey belch. "Four god-blasted years."

"I know." Daedalus' face wrinkled briefly with shared pain. He almost put out a hand to take the other's arm; a little too familiar, here in public. "Prince Theseus, will you walk with me? King Minos will want to see you promptly, I expect."

"I bear him greetings from m'father."

"Of course. Meanwhile the officers here will help your shipmates on their way to find their quarters."

Thus the ascent from the harbor turned into an informal procession, with Theseus and Daedalus walking ahead, and the small honor guard following a few paces back, irregularly accompanied by the remaining thirteen Athenians, who looked about them and perhaps wondered a little at the unceremoniousness of it all. The girls whispered a little at the freedom of the Cretan women, who, though obviously respectable as shown by their dress and attitudes, strode about so boldly in the streets. The gaily decorated wagon in which the new arrivals might have ridden, rumbled uphill empty behind a pair of grateful horses. The wagon's bright paint and streamers jarred with the mock-mourning of the newcomers.

When they had climbed partway through the town, Daedalus suggested gently to his companion that the imitation mourning *would* be in especially bad taste at Court today, for a real funeral was going to take place in the afternoon.

"Someone in Minos' family?"

"No. One who would have been your fellow student had he lived; in his third year at school. A Lapith. But

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still."

"Oh." Theseus slowed his long if slightly wobbling strides and rubbed a hand across his forehead, looking at the fingers afterward. "Now what do I do?"

"Let us not, after all, take you to Minos right away." Daedalus turned and with a gesture called one of the Court officials forward, saying to him: "Arrange some better quarters for Prince Theseus than those customarily given the new students. And he and his shipmates will need some time to make themselves presentable before they go before the King. Meanwhile, I will seek out Minos myself and offer explanations."

The officer's face and his quick salute showed his relief.

"DAEDALUS." King Minos' manner was pleasant but business-like as he welcomed his engineer into a pleasant, white-walled room where at the moment his chief tax-gatherers were arguing over innumerable scrolls spread out upon stone tables. Open colonnades gave a view of blue ocean in one direction, Mount Ida in another. "What can I do to help you out today? How goes the rock-thrower machine?" The King's once-raven hair was graying, and his bare paunch stood honestly and comfortably over the waistband of his linen loincloth. But his arms within their circlets of heavy gold looked muscular as ever, and his eyes were still keen and penetrating.

"The machine goes well enough, sire. I wait for the cattle-hides from Thrace, that are to be twisted into the sling, and I improve my waiting time by overseeing construction of the bronze shields." Actually by now the smiths and smelters were all well trained and needed little supervision; so there was time for thought whilst looking into the forge and furnace flames, time to see again the gull's effortless flight as captured by the mind and eye . . . "Today, King Minos, I come before you with another matter, one that I am afraid will not wait." He began to relate to Minos the circumstances of the Prince's arrival, leaving out neither the black sails nor the drunkenness, though they were mere details compared with the great fact of Theseus' coming to be enrolled in the school.

Minos during this recital led him into another room, out of earshot of the tax gatherers. There the King, frowning, walked restlessly, pausing to look out of a window to where preparations for the afternoon's funeral games were under way. "How is Aegeus?" he asked, without turning.

"Prince Theseus reports his esteemed father in excellent health."

"Daedalus, it will not do for King Aegeus' son to leave Crete with his brains addled, any more than they may be already." The King turned. "As has happened to a few—Cretans and Athenians and others—since the school was opened. Or to leap from a tower, like this young man we're burying today. Not that I think the Prince would ever choose that exit."

"Yours are words of wisdom, Sire. And no more will it be desirable for Theseus to fail publicly at an assigned task, even if it be only obtaining a certificate of achievement from a school."

Minos walked again. "Your turn to speak wisely, counselor. Frankly, what do you think the Prince's chances are, of pursuing his studies here successfully?"

Daedalus' head bobbed in a light bow. "I share your own seeming misgivings on the subject, great King."

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"Yes. Um. We both know Theseus, and we both know also what the school is like. You better than I, I suppose. I can have Phaedra keep an eye on him, of course. She will be starting this semester too—not that she has her older sister's brains, but it may do her some good. It may. He is as stalwart and handsome as ever, I suppose? Yes, then no doubt she will have an eye on him in any case."

Continuing to think aloud, arms folded and a frown on his face, Minos came closer, until an observer might have thought that he was threatening the other man. "I had no thought that Aegeus was about to send his own son. But I suppose he did not want his nobles' children displaying any honors that could not be matched in his own house. Oh, if he'd had a scholarly boy, one given to hanging around with graybeard sages, then I would have issued a specific invitation. I would've thought it expected. But given the Prince's nature . . ."

Minos unfolded his arms but kept his eyes fixed firmly on his waiting subject. "Daedalus. You are Theseus' friend, from your sojourn at the Athenian court. And you were enrolled briefly in the school yourself . . . I sometimes marvel that you did not throw yourself into it more wholeheartedly."

"Perhaps we sages are not immune to professional jealousy, Sire."

"Perhaps." Minos' gaze twinkled keenly. "However that may be, I now expect you to do two things."

Daedalus bowed.

"First, stand ready to offer Theseus your tutorial services, as they may be required."

"Of course, Sire."

"Secondly—will you go today to see the Bull and talk to him? I think in this case you have greater competence than any of my usual ambassadors. Do what you can toward explaining the situation. Report back to me when you have seen the Bull."

Daedalus bowed.

ON HIS WAY toward the Labyrinth, at whose center the Bull dwelt, he stopped to peer in unnoticed at the elementary school, which like most other governmental departments had its own corner of the vast sprawling House. On a three-legged stool surrounded by a gaggle of other boys and girls sat ten-year-old Icarus, stylus in hand, bent over wax tablets on a table before him. Chanting grammar, an earnest young woman paced among her pupils. Daedalus knew her for one of the more recent graduates of the school where Theseus was bound. For a moment the King's engineer had the mad vision of Theseus in this classroom, teaching; hardly madder than that of the Prince sitting down to study, he supposed. After a last glance at his own fidgeting son—Icarus was bright enough, but didn't seem to want to apply himself to learning yet—Daedalus walked on.

As he passed along the flank of the vast House, he glanced in the direction of the field of rock-hewn tombs nearby, and saw the small procession returning across the bridge that spanned the Kairatos, coming back to the House for the games, the bull-dancing and the wrestling that should please the gods.

Pausing in a cloistered walk to watch, he pondred briefly the fact that Minos himself was not coming to the funeral. Of course the King was always busy. There was Queen Pasiphae, though, taking her seat of honor in the stands, rouged and wigged as usual these days to belie her age, tight girdle thrusting her full

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bare breasts up in a passable imitation of youth. And there came Princess Ariadne to the royal bench, taking the position of Master of the Games, as befitted her status of eldest surviving child. And there was Phaedra—how old now? sixteen?—and quite the prettiest girl in sight.

He had thought that Theseus might be sleeping it off by now, but evidently the recuperative powers of youth, at least in the royal family of Athens, were even stronger than Daedalus remembered them to be. The Prince, cleansed by what must have been a complete bath and scraping, and suitably tagged for a modest degree of real mourning by a black band around his massive biceps, was just now vaulting into the ring for a wrestling turn. Stripped naked for the contest, Theseus was an impressive figure. Daedalus stayed long enough to watch him earn a quick victory over his squat, powerful adversary, some Cretan champion, and then claim a wreath from Ariadne's hand.

Then Daedalus walked on. There was, on this side of the House, no sharp line of architectural demarcation where ordinary living space ended and the Labyrinth began. Roofed space became less common, and at the same time walls grew unscalably high and smooth and passages narrowed. Stairs took the walker up and down for no good reason, and up and down again, until he was no longer sure whether he walked above the true ground level or below it. Windows were no more.

Now Daedalus was in the precincts of the real school, which Thesus would attend. Behind closed wooden doors taut silence reigned, or else came out the drone of reciting voices. A dozen times a stranger would have been confused, and like as not turned back to where he started, before Daedalus reached a sign, warning in three languages that the true Labyrinth lay just ahead. He passed beneath the sign with quick, sure steps.

HE HAD GONE scarcely fifty paces farther, turning half a dozen corners in that distance, before he became aware that someone was following him. A pause to glance back got him a brief glimpse of a long-haired girl's head, peering round a corner in his direction. The girl ducked out of sight at once. All was silent until his own feet began to move again, whereupon the shuffle of those pursuing him resumed.

With a sigh, he stopped again. Turned and called softly, "Stay." Then he walked back. As he had expected, it was a student, a slender Athenian girl of about eighteen, leaning against the stone wall in an exhausted but defensive pose. Daedalus vaguely remembered seeing her around for the last year or two. Now her eyes had gone blank and desperate with the endless corners and walls and angles and stairs and tantalizing glimpses of sky beyond the bronze grillwork high above. Failing some kind of test, obviously, she stared at him in silent hopelessness.

It was not for him to interfere. "Follow me," he whispered to her, "and you will come out in the apartments of the Bull himself. Is that what you want?"

The girl responded with a negative gesture, weak but quick. There was a great fear in her eyes. It was not the fear of a soldier entering a losing battle, or a captive going to execution, but great all the same. Though not as raw and immediate as those particular kinds of terror, it was on a level just

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as deep. Not death, only failure was in prospect, but that could be bad enough, especially for the young.

He turned from her and went on, and heard no more of feet behind. Soon he came to where a waterpipe crossed the passageway, concealed under a kind of stile. He had overseen most of the Labyrinth's construction, and was its chief designer. This wall here on his left was as thick as four men's bodies lying head to toe. Just outside, though you would never guess it from in here, was a free sunny slope, and the last creaking shadoof in the chain of lifting devices that brought seawater here by stages from the salt pools and reservoirs below.

Choosing unthinkingly the correct branchings of the twisted way, he came out abruptly into the central open space. Beyond the broad, raised, sundazzled stone dais in its center yawned the dark mouths of the Bull's own rooms. In the middle of the dais, like the gnomon of a sundial, stood a big chair on whose humped seat no human could comfortably have perched. On it the White Bull sat waiting, as if expecting him.

"Learn from me, Dae-dal-us." This was what the Bull always said to him in place of any more conventional greeting. It had chronic trouble in sliding its inhumanly deep, slow voice from one syllable to another without a complete stop in between, though when necessary the sounds came chopping out at a fast rate.

The Bull stood up like a man from its chair, on the dais surrounded by the gently flowing moat of seawater that it did not need, but loved. It was hairy and muscular, and larger than any but the biggest men. Though wild tales about its bullhood flew through the House, Daedalus, who had talked to it perhaps as much as any other man, was not even sure that it was truly male. The silver-tipped hair of fur grew even thicker about the loins than on the rest of the body, which was practically covered. Its feet—Daedalus sometimes thought of them as its hind feet, though it invariably walked on only two—ended in hooves, or at least in soles so thick and hard as to come very near that definition. Its upper limps beneath their generous fur were quite manlike in the number and position of their joints, and their muscular development put Daedalus in mind of Theseus' arms.

Any illusion that this might be a costumed man died quickly with inspection of the hands. The fingernails were so enlarged as to be almost tiny hooves, and each hand bore two opposable thumbs. The head, at first glance, was certainly a bull's, with its fine short snowy hair and the two blunt horns; but one saw quickly that the lips were far too mobile, the eyes too human and intelligent.

"Learn from me, Dae-dal-us."

"We have tried that." The conflict between them was now too old, and still too sharp, to leave much room for formal courtesy.

"Learn." The deep and bull-like voice as stubborn as a wall. "The secrets of the a-tom and the star are mine to give."

"Then what need have you for one more student, one worn old man like me? There must be younger minds, all keen and eager to be taught. Even today a fresh contingent has come from Athens for your instruction."

"You are not tru-ly old as yet; there are dec-ades of strong life a-head. And if you tru-ly learn, you may extend your life."

Daedalus curtly signed refusal, con-

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fronting the other across the moat's reflected sky. The King had had him raise the water up here for the Bull's pleasure, evidently as some reminder of a homeland too remote for human understanding. Some ten years ago the Bull had appeared on the island, speaking passable Greek and asking to see the King, offering gifts of knowledge. Some said it had come out of the sea, but the homeland it occasionally alluded to was much more wonderful than that.

Daedalus said: "For the past few years I have watched the young men and women going in here to be taught, and I have seen and talked to them again when they came out. I do not know whether I want to be taught what they are learning. Not one has whispered to me the stars' or atoms' secrets."

"All fra-gile ves-sels, Dae-dal-us. Of lim-i-ted cap-a-cit-y. And once cracked, good on-ly to be stud-ied to find out how the pot is made." The Bull took a step toward him on its shaggy, goat-shaped legs. "For such a mind as yours, I bring ful-fill-ment, nev-er bur-sting."

It was always the same plea: learn from me. And always the same arguments, with variations, shot back and forth between them. "Are there no sturdy, capacious vessels among the students?"

"Not one in a thou-sand will have your mind. Not one in ten thou-sand."

"We have tried, remember? It was not good for me."

"Try a-gain."

Daedalus looked around him almost involuntarily, then lowered his voice. "I told you what I wanted. Teach me to fly. Show me how the wings should be constructed, rather."

"It is not that sim-ple, Dae-dal-us." The White Bull's inhumanly deep voice stretched out in something like a yawn, and it resumed its chair. It ate only vegetables and fruits, and scattered about it on the dais was a light litter of husks and shriveled leaves. "But if you stu-dy in my school four years, you will be a-ble to build wings for your-self af-ter that time. I prom-ise you."

The man clenched his calloused hands. "How can it take me four years to learn to build a wing? If I can learn a thing at all, the idea of it should take root within my mind inside four days, and any skill required should come into my fingers in four months. The knowledge might take longer to perfect, of course—but I do not ask to build a flock of birds complete with beaks and claws, and breathe life into them, and set them catching fish and laying eggs. No, all I want are a few feathers for myself."

When he had enrolled, a year or so ago, he soon found out that he was to learn to build wings not by trying to build them, but by first studying "the knowledge of numbers" as the White Bull put it, and then the strengths and other properties of the various materials that might be used, and theories of the air and of birds, and a distracting list of other matters having even less apparent relevance. Some of this, the materials, Daedalus knew pretty well already, and about the rest he did not care. His enrollment had not lasted long.

"Try a-gain, Dae-dal-us." The voice maintained its solemn, stubborn roar. "You will be-come a tru-ly ed-u-cat-ed man. New hor-i-zons will o-pen for you."

"You mean you will teach me not what I want to learn, but rather to forget wanting it. To learn instead to make my life depend and pivot on

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your teaching." Here he was again, getting bogged down in the same old unwinnable dispute. Why keep at it? Because there were moments when he seemed to himself insane for rejecting the undoubted wealth of knowledge that the Bull could give him. And yet he knew that he was right to do so.

"Bull, what good will it do you if I come to sit at your feet and learn? There has to be something that you want out of it."

"My rea-son for be-ing is to teach." It nodded down solemnly at him from its high chair, and crossed its hind legs like some goat-god. "For this I crossed o-ceans un-im-ag'-na-ble between the stars. When I con-vey my teach-ings to minds a-ble to hold them, then I too will be ful-filled and can know peace. Shall I tell Min-os that you still re-fuse? There are wea-pons much great-er than cat-a-pults that you could make for him."

"I doubt you will tell Minos anything. I doubt that he will speak to you any more."

"Why not? You mean I have displeased him?"

He meant, but was not going to say, that Minos seemed to be getting increasingly afraid of his pet monster. It was not, Daedalus thought, that the King suspected the Bull of plotting to seize power, or anything along that line. Minos' fear seemed to lie on a deeper, more personal level. The King perhaps had not admitted this fear to himself, and anyway the White Bull brought him too much prestige, not to speak of useful knowledge, for him to want to get rid of it.

Daedalus said: "The King sent me today, when he could have come himself, or else had you brought before him."

"On what er-rand?"

"Not to renew old arguments." Daedalus spat into the White Bull's moat and watched critically as the spittle was borne along toward the splash gutter at the side. He was proud of his waterworks and liked to see them operating properly. "Among today's Athenians is one whose coming poses problems for us all." He identified Theseus, and outlined Minos' concern for his alliance with Aegeus. "The young man is probably here at least in part because his father wants him kept out of possible intrigues at home. Minos said nothing of the kind to me, but I heard it between the words of what he said."

"I think I un-der-stand, Dae-dal-us. Yet I can but try to im-part knowledge to this young man. If he can-not or will not learn, I can-not cert-i-fy that he has. Else what I have cert-i-fied of o-ther stu-dents be-comes sus-pect."

"In this case, surely, an exception might be made."

They argued this point for a while, Daedalus getting nowhere. Until the White Bull suddenly offered that something might be done to make Theseus' way easier, if Daedalus himself were to enroll as a student again.

Daedalus was angry. "Minos will really be displeased with you if I bear back the message that you want me to spend my next four years studying rather than working for my King."

"E-ven stu-dy-ing half time, one with a mind like yours may learn in three years what a mere-ly ex-cell-ent stu-dent learns in four."

The man was silent, holding in, like an old soldier at attention.

"Why do you re-sist me, Dae-dal-us? Not rea-lly be-cause you fear your mind will crack be-neath the bur-den of my trea-sures. Few e-ven of the poor stu-dents have this hap-pen."

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Daedalus relaxed suddenly. He sat down on the fine stone pavement and was able to smile and even chuckle. "Oh great White Bull, whenever I see man or god approaching to do me a favor, a free good turn, I do a good turn for myself and flee the other way. Through experience I have acquired this habit, and it lies near the roots of whatever modest stock of wisdom I possess."

There was at first no answer from the creature on the high inhuman chair, and Daedalus pressed on. "Because I *can* learn something, does that mean I must? Should I not count the price?"

"There is no price, for you."

"Bah."

"What is the price for a man who stum-bles up-on great trea-sure, if he sim-ply bend and pick it up?"

"A good question. I will think upon it."

"But the cost to him is all the treasure, if he re-fuse e-ven to bend."

HE KNEW he had no particular skill in intrigue, and was afraid to do anything but carry the whole truth back to Minos. The King of course gave him no way out, and next Daedalus was forced to enroll. He had no black sail to hoist, but simply walked to the White Bull's apartments again and said, "Well, here I am."

"Good." He could not tell if the Bull was gloating. "First, a re-fresh-er course." And shortly Daedalus was walking into a classroom where Theseus and Phaedra sat side by side among other young folk. Daedalus took his place on a bench, endured some curious glances, and waited, gnarled and incongruous, until the Bull entered and began to teach.

This was not instruction in the human way. Daedalus knew that he and his fellow students still sat rooted to their benches, with the tall shaggy figure of the Bull before them. But there came with the sudden clarity of lightning a vision in which he seemed to have sprung upward from the ground, flying at more than arrow-speed into the blue. The Labyrinth and the House of the Double Axe dropped clear away, and his view carried over the whole fair isle of Crete. Its mountains dwindled and flattened, soon became almost at one with the fields and orchards, and very quickly the sea was visible on every side. Other islands popped into view, and then the jagged mainland of Greece. Then the whole Mediterranean, with a sunspot of glare on it bigger than lost Crete itself; then Europe and much of Africa, and then a hemisphere—the shared experience was too much for some of the students, and there were outcries and faintings around Daedalus. He was a little shaken himself, though he had seen this much during his previous enrollment.

Eventually the first day of his renewed schooling was over, and in due time the second and third had passed. Lessons came in a more or less fixed plan. Seldom were they as dramatically presented as that early one that indicated the size and complexity of the world. Mostly the students studied from books, hand-copied for them by students more advanced, who also did much of the teaching. And there were tests.

QUESTION: THE WORLD ON WHICH MEN LIVE IS:

A. Bigger than the island of Crete.

B. Approximately a sphere in shape.

C. In need of cultivation and care, that can be accomplished only through education, if it is to support

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properly an eventual population of billions of human beings.
D. All of the above.

"Are these the secrets of the stars and atoms, Bull?"

"Pa-tience, Dae-dal-us. One step at a time. Tra-di-tion hal-lows the mode of tea-ching."

"Bah."

"Now you are a stu-dent. Dis-respect low-ers your grades and slows your pro-gress."

Theoretically his attendance was to be for half a day, every day except the rare holidays. But it was tacitly understood between the Bull and Minos—at least Daedalus hoped it was—that Daedalus in fact kept to a flexible schedule, spending whatever time was necessary on the King's projects, the catapults, the life-like statues, to keep them progressing. His days were more than full, though he could have done all the schoolwork required so far with half a brain.

Meanwhile the White Bull seemed to be keeping his part of the bargain. One of his chief acolytes, Stomargos, an earnest mainland youth, frail and clumsy at the same time, explained to Daedalus how Theseus was being shunted into a special program.

"The Prince will be allowed to choose both his Greater and Lesser Branches of learning from courses that have not previously been given for credit," said the young man, whose own Greater Branch was, as he had proudly informed Daedalus, the Transmission of Learning itself. "Since Prince Theseus seems fated to spend most of his life as a warrior, the Bull is preparing for him courses in Strategic Decision, Command Presence, and Tactical Leadership—these in addition, of course, to those in Language, Number, and the World of Men that are required of all first-year students."

"I wish the royal student well." Daedalus paused for thought. "It may be foolish of me to ask, but I cannot forbear. Where and how is the course on Tactical Leadership to be conducted?"

"All courses are conducted within the student's mind, Daedalus." The answer sounded somewhat condescending. Nonetheless Daedalus pursued the matter, out of concerned curiosity, and found out that the Labyrinth itself, or some part of it, was to the the training ground. Beyond that Stomargos knew little.

Back at his workshop that afternoon, Daedalus found a message from Icarus' teacher awaiting him—the boy had run off somewhere, playing truant. It was the second or third time that this had happened within a month. And scarcely had he grumbled at this message and then put it aside to take up his real work, when Icarus himself came dawdling in, an elbow scraped raw, arm messy with dried blood from some mishap during the day. Daedalus waved the note and growled and lectured, but in the son's face he could see the mother, and he could not be harsh. He ordered a servant to take Icarus home, see to his injury, and keep him confined to quarters for the remainder of the day.

Then there was a little time at last to part the curtains at the workshop's rear, and move through the secret door there that slid out of the way as if by magic, carrying with it neatly what had looked like an awkward, obstructing pile of dirty trash. Time to crank open a secret skylight above a secret room, and look at the great man-wings spread out on a bench.

Long ago he had given up trying to use real feathers; now he worked with

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canvas and leather and light cotton padding to add shape. But work was lagging lately; he felt in his bones that more thought, more cunning was needed. When he strapped on one wing and beat it downward through the air, the effect was not much different from that of waving a fan. He was not impelled noticeably toward the sky. There were secrets still to be discovered . . .

When he got back to quarters himself, it was late at night. He grabbed a mouthful of fruit and cheese, drank half a cup of wine, shooed a bored and sleepy concubine out of his way, and dropped on his own soft but simple bed to rest. . . . It seemed that hardly had his eyes closed, however, before he heard the voices of soldiers, bullying a servant at his door: ". . . orders to bring Daedalus at once before the King."

This was not Minos' usual way of summoning one of his most trusted and respected advisors, and Daedalus knew fear as, shivering, he went with them out under the late, cold stars. The lieutenant took pity on him. "It concerns Prince Theseus, sir. The King is . . ." The soldier shook his head, and let his words trail off with a puffed sigh of awe.

It was the formal audience chamber to which the soldiers brought him—a bad sign, Daedalus thought. At the King's nod they saluted and backed out, leaving the engineer standing before the throne. Theseus moved over a little on the carpet to make room for him. No one else was now present except Minos, who, seated on his tall chair between the painted griffins, continued a merciless chewing-out of the young Prince. The flames of the oil-lamps trembled now and then as if in awe. The tone of the King's voice was settled, almost weary, suggesting that this tongue-lashing had been going on for some time.

Sneaking glances at Theseus, Daedalus judged he had been drunk recently, but was no longer. Scratches on the sullen, handsome face, and a bruise on one bare shoulder—Theseus was attired in the Cretan gentleman's elegant loincloth now—suggested recent strenuous activity, and the King's words filled in the story.

Icarus had not been the day's only truant, and Theseus would have been wiser to bruise himself in some activity so innocuous as seeking birds' eggs on the crags. Instead he had led some of his restive classmates on an escapade in town. Tactical Leadership, thought Daedalus, even while he kept his face impeccably grave and his eyes suitably downcast in the face of the Minoan wrath.

Violence against citizens and their valuable slaves. Destruction of property. Shameful public drunkenness, bring disrepute on House and School alike. All topped off by the outrage of the daughters of some merchant families who were too important to be so treated with impunity.

Theseus held his hands behind him, sometimes tightening them into fists, sometimes playing like an idiot with his own massive fingers. His heavy features were set in disciplined silence now. This was probably like being home again and listening to his father.

". . . classmates involved will be expelled and sent home in disgrace," the King was saying. He paused now, for the first time since the soldiers left. "To do the same to you would of course be an insult to your father and a danger to our alliance. Daedalus, did I not set you in charge of this young blockhead's schooling?"

In the face of this inaccuracy,

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Daedalus merely bowed his head a little lower. Now was not the moment for any philosopher's insistence on precise Truth; rather, the great fact that Minos was in a rage easily took precedence over Truth in any of its lesser forms.

"His schooling is not proceeding satisfactorily, Daedalus."

The engineer bowed somewhat lower yet.

"And as for you, *Prince*—now you may speak. What have you to say?"

Theseus shifted weight on his big feet, and spoke up calmly enough. "Sire, that school is driving me to drink and madness."

Now Minos too was calm. The royal rage had been used up, or perhaps it could be turned on and off like one of Daedalus' water valves. "Prince Theseus, you are under house arrest until further notice. Except for school attendance. I will put six strong soldiers at your door, and you may assault them, or try to, should you feel the need for further recreation."

"I am sorry, King Minos." And it seemed he was. "But I can take no more of that school."

"You will take more of it. You must." Then the King's eye swung back again. "Daedalus, what are we to do? I and the Queen leave in three days for the state visits, in Macedonia and elsewhere. We may be gone for months."

"I fear I have been neglectful regarding the Prince's problems, sire. Let me now make them my prime concern."

SHORTLY AFTER DAWN a few hours later, Daedalus came visiting the White Bull's quarters once again. This time he found the dais uninhabited, and he sloshed through the moat and stood beside the odd chair. There was never any need to call. Shortly the silver-and-snow figure emerged from a darkened doorway, to splash gratefully in the salt moat and them climb onto the dais to bid him welcome.

"Learn from me, Dae-dal-us! How are you learn-ing?"

"White Bull, I come not on my own affairs today, but on Prince Theseus' behalf. He is having trouble—well, he informs me that this testing in the Labyrinth, in particular, is like to drive him to violent madness. Knowing him, I do not think he is exaggerating. Must this Tactical course be continued in its present form?"

"The course of stu-dy of tac-tics is pre-scribed. In part, as fol-lows: The teach-er shall e-voke from the students facts as to their de-term-in-ation of spa-tial lo-ca-tion—"

He couldn't stand it. "Oh great teacher! Master of the Transmission of Learning—"

"Not Mas-ter. My rank is that of A-dept, a high-er rank."

"Master or adept or divinity or what you will. I suppose it means nothing that the Prince's fate in battle, even insofar as he may escape all the sheer chance stupidities of war, is not at all likely to depend on his ability to grope his way out of a maze?"

"He has been al-lowed to choose his course of stu-dy, Dae-dal-us. Beyond that, spe-cial treat-ment can-not be ac-cord-ed a-ny stu-dent."

"Well, *I* have never fought anyone with a sword, White Bull. *I* have never bullied and challenged men and cheered them on to get them into combat. Once, on the mainland, watching from the highest and safest place that I could reach, I saw Prince Theseus do these things. Some vassal's uprising against Aegeus. Theseus put it down, almost single-handedly,

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you might say. I think he would not be likely to learn much from me in the way of military science, were I to lecture on the subject. No doubt you, however, have great skill and knowledge in this field to impart?"

"My qual-if-i-ca-tions as teach-er are be-yong your ab-il-i-ty to com-pre-hend, much less to ques-tion. Your own pro-gress should be your con-cern."

"If Theseus fails, I may not be on hand to make any progress through your school. Minos will be angry at me. And not at me alone."

But argue as he might he still could not get his ward excused from Tractical training and testing in the Labyrinth. For the next couple of days the Prince at least stayed in school and worked, and Daedalus' hopes rose; then, emerging one afternoon from his own classroom, he saw a page from the Inner House coming to meet him, and knew a sinking feeling. The Princess Ariadne required his presence in the audience chamber at once.

He found Ariadne perched regally on the throne; but as soon as she had waved her attendants out and the two of them were alone she came down from the chair and spoke to him informally.

"Daedalus, before my father's departure he informed me that Prince Theseus was having—difficulties—in school. The King impressed upon me the importance of this problem. Also I have—have talked with the Prince myself, and find that the situation does not seem to be improving." Ariadne sounded nervous, vaguely distracted.

"I fear that you are right, Princess." Then before he had to say anything more, another page was announcing Theseus himself. There was no escort of soldiers with the Prince; evidently the house arrest instituted by Minos had already been set aside.

The exchange of greetings between the two young people sounded somewhat too stiffly formal to Daedalus, and he noted that Ariadne scarcely looked directly at Theseus for a moment. Certainly she had not so avoided watching him during the wrestling match. And when the Prince looked at her now, his face was wooden.

For a few moments Daedalus thought perhaps that they were quarreling, but he soon decided that the absolute opposite was more likely: an affair, and they were trying to hide it.

In response to an awkward-sounding request from Ariadne, Theseus related his day's continued difficulties in school. Now she turned, almost pleading, to the older man. "Daedalus, he will fail his Labyrinth tests again. What are we to do? We must find *some* means of helping him." And a glance flicked between the two young people that was very brief, but still enough to assure Daedalus of what was going on.

"Ah." He relaxed, looked at them both with something like a smile. He only hoped infatuation would not bring Ariadne to any too-great foolishness. Meanwhile, Theseus' problem might be easier to solve while Minos, with his awe of the Bull, was not around.

Conferring with the Prince, while Ariadne hovered near and listened greedily, he made sure that the maze itself was indeed the key to the young man's difficulties. In courses other than Tactics the Prince might, probably could, do well enough to just scrape by.

With a charred stick Daedalus drew, from memory, a plan of the key

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portion of the Labyrinth right on the floor near the foot of the throne. The griffins glared down balefully at the three of them squatting there like children at some game.

Theseus stared gloomily at the patterns while Daedalus talked. Ariadne's hand came over once, forgetfully, to touch her lover's, and then flew back, while her eyes jumped up to Daedalus' face. He affirmed that he had noticed nothing, by holding his own scowling concentration on the floor.

"Now try it this way, Prince. The secret . . . let's see. Yes. If you are finding your way *in* the secret is to let your right hand touch the wall at the start. Hey?"

"Yes, I can always tell my right hand from my left. Out here anyway." Theseus was trying grimly. "Right always holds the sword."

"Yes. So if you want to go inward, as I say, first let your right hand glide continuously along the walls, in imagination if not in fact. Then, whenever you must climb a stair, switch at its top to gliding your left hand along the wall; in other words, when there's a choice, turn always to the left. Whenever a stair leads you downward, switch again at its bottom to going right. Now, if you are seeking your way *out*, simply reverse—"

"Daedalus." The Prince's voice stopped him in mid-sentence. "Thanks for what you are trying to do. But I tell you, when I am put in there I cannot help myself." Theseus got to his feet, as if unconscious of the movement, his eyes fixed now on distance. "*in there* I forget all your lefts and rights, and all else, except I know the walls are crushing in on me, the doors all sealing themselves off—" Ariadne put out a hand again, and drew it back. Now she was standing too. "—so there is nothing left but the stone walls, all coming closer . . . I wish you had never told me that some of them are four men's bodies thick."

Theseus was shivering slightly, as if with cold. The look in his eyes was one that Daedalus had seen there only rarely in the past, and now Daedalus too got to his feet, moving with deliberate care.

"If that god-blasted cow dares lecture me on courage and perseverance in my stu-dies one more time, I swear by all the gods I'll break its neck."

"Very well, my friend." He laid a hard hand gently and briefly on the Prince's shoulder. "There are other ways that we can help."

MIDAFTERNOON of the day following, and in his own classroom Daedalus had fallen into a daydream of numbers that his stubborn mind kept trying to fit to flying gulls. He was roused from this state by a hand shaking his own shoulder.

Stomargos stood at his side, looking down at him in obscure triumph. "Daedalus, the White Bull wants to see you, at once."

He would not ask what for, but got to his feet and followed the educator in a silence of outward calm.

Daedalus had expected that when they reached the Bull's private quarters Stomargos would be sent out. But the Bull, waiting for them on its tall chair, made no sign of dismissal, and the young man, with the smug look on his face, remained standing at Daedalus' side.

Today for once the Bull did not say *learn from me*. "We have dis-cov-ered the Prin-ce's cheat-ing, Dae-dal-us."

"Cheating? What do you mean?" He had never been any good with lies.

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"The thread tied on his right hand. The ti-ny met-al balls to bounce and roll and seek al-ways the down-ward slope of floor, how-ev-er gen-tle. How did you make a met-al ball so smooth and round?"

He had dropped them molten from a tall tower, into water. He wondered if the Bull would be impressed to hear his method. "I see," he said aloud, trying to be non-committal, admitting nothing. "What do you mean to do?"

"Leave us, Sto-mar-gos," the White Bull said at last. And when they were alone, it said: "Now learn from me, Dae-dal-us. As you have sought to learn."

. . . and he reeled and almost fell into the moat before he could sit down, as the pictures came into his mind, this time with painful power. There were the wings, not much different in their gross structure from those he had in his workshop, but these were pierced through at many points with tiny, peculiarly curved channels. Soft, sculptured cavities that widened just slightly and quickly closed again as in his vision the wings beat and the air flowed through and around them. With each beat, the air below the wings, encountering the channels, changed pressure wildly, a thin layer of it turning momentarily almost as hard as wood. Somehow in the vision he could feel as well as see the fluid alterations . . . and just *so* the pinions' width and length must be, in relation to the flyer's length and weight, and *so* the variation in the channels that went through the different regions of the wing . . .

It all burned into the brain. There would be no forgetting this, even if forgetfulness were one day willed. But the imprinting vision was soon ended, and he climbed shakily up to a standing pose.

"Bull . . . why did you never before give me such teaching?"

"It will not make of you an ed-u-cat-ed man, Dae-dal-us."

"I thank you for it . . . but why, then, do you give it now?"

The Bull's voice was almost soft, and it did not seem to be looking directly at him. "I think this teach-ing will re-move you from my pres-ence. One way or a-no-ther stop your dis-rup-tion of my school."

"I see." In his mind the plan for the new wings burned, urgent as a fire in the workshop. "You will not tell Minos, then, that you accuse me of helping Theseus to cheat?"

"Your val-ue to the King is great, Dae-dal-us. If he is forced to choose be-tween us I may pos-sib-ly be sac-rif-iced. Or my school closed. Therefore I take this step to re-move you as my ri-val. I see now you are not worthy of fine ed-u-ca-tion."

THE WINGS still burning before his eyes, he had let himself be led off through the Labyrinth for a hundred paces or so (Stomargos, triumph fading into puzzlement, his escort once again) before it came to him. "And Theseus? What of him?"

"I am a witness to the Prince's attempt at cheating," said Stomargos, firmly and primly. "And the Bull has decided that he now must be expelled."

"That cannot be!" Daedalus was so aghast that the other was shaken for a moment.

But for a moment only. "Oh, the Bull and I are quite agreed on that. The Prince is probably receiving his formal notification at this moment."

And Daedalus spun around and ran, back toward the inner Labyrinth.

"Stay! Stay!" Stomargos shouted, trotting in pursuit. "You are to leave

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the precincts of the school at once . . ." But just then the roaring and the struggling sounded from within.

Theseus and the Bull were grappling on the central dais, arms locked on each other's necks, Daedalus saw as he burst on the scene. The tall chair was overturned, fruit scattered underfoot. In Theseus' broad back the great bronze cables stood like structural arches glowing from the forge.

The end came even as Daedalus' feet splashed in the moat. He heard the sickening bony crack and the Bull's hoarse warbling cry at the same instant. The Prince staggered back to stand there staring down at what his hands had done. The gray-white mound of fur, suddenly no more man-like than a dying bear, dropped at his feet.

Stomargos came in, and splashed over quickly to join the others on the dais. He pointed, goggled, opened his mouth and began an almost wordless call for help. He turned and ran, and it was Daedalus who had to stop him with a desperate watery tackle in the moat.

"Theseus! Help me! Keep this one quiet." And in a moment the Prince of Athens had taken charge. Stomargos' head was clamped down under water, and soon the bubbles ceased to rise and make their way to the splash gutter at his side.

The two men still alive climbed out onto the dais. Theseus, still panting with his exertions against the Bull, seemed with every working of his lungs to grow a little taller and straighter, like some young tree just freed of a deforming burden, resuming its natural form. "Does he still breathe, Daedalus?" A nod toward the fallen Bull.

Daedalus was crouching down, prodding into gray fur, trying to find out. "I am not sure."

"Well, let him, if he can. It matters to me no longer. My ship and men can be got ready in an hour or two and I am going home. Or somewhere else, if my father will not have me in Athens now. But better a pirate's life, even, than . . ." His eyes flashed once at the convoluted walls surrounding.

Daedalus started to ask why he thought he would be allowed to leave, but then understanding came. "And myself:" he asked.

"Ariadne will come with me, I expect."

"Gods of sea and sky!"

"And her sister Phaedra. And you are welcome, friend, though I can promise you no safe workshop, nor slaves, nor high place at a court."

"I want no place as high as a sun-dried pirate's, which I fear Minos might make for me here, when he comes home. Now we had better move swiftly, before this violence is discovered."

"Dae-dal-us." The unexpected voice was a mere thread of sound, stretched and about to break.

He bent down closer beside its head. "White Bull, how is it with you?"

"As with a man whose neck is broken, Dae-dal-us. Af-ter to-day I teach no more."

"Would I had learned from you before today, White Bull. And would you had learned from me."

THEY WALKED OUT TOGETHER, looking a little shaken no doubt, as was only natural for two students who had probably just been expelled. Theseus muttered to passing teachers that the Bull and Stomargos were talking together and did not wish to be dis-

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turbed. They walked without hurrying to Ariadne, and then one trusted servant was sent to gather Theseus' crew. And another to help Daedalus look for his son, when he discovered that Icarus was truant yet again today, not to be found in school.

THE WILD LANDS where boys looked for birds and dreams swept up mile after mile behind and above the House of the Double Axe.

"We can wait no longer for him, Daedalus. My men's lives are all in danger, and the Princesses' too. As soon as the bodies are found, some military man or sea captain will take it upon himself to stop my sailing, or try to do so."

And Ariadne: "Theseus must get away. My father will not deal too grievously with you, Daedalus; he depends on you too much."

Phaedra was silent, biting her full lips. Her fingers as if moving on their own caressed Theseus' arm, but Ariadne did not see.

Daedalus saw in his mind's eye the sun-dried pirates on the dock; and his workshop with the hidden, unfinished wings. and he saw how the small trusting shadow would cross the threshold when Icarus came running home . . .

LONG, helmed shadows came first, the black triangles of shadow-spearheads thrust ahead of them. This time they held their weapons ready as they marched him deeper into the House, and Icarus, returning wearily from some adventure, was only just in time to see his father arrested, and be swept up like a dropped crumb by tidy soldiery.

A month must pass before Minos came home again, and the de facto military government, taking over after the Princesses' desertion, did not want to assume responsibility for judging Daedalus. He and his son were confined under strict house arrest in his workshop and quarters, and allotted also a small area of Labyrinth that lay between.

All entrances and exits to their small domain were walled up—the masonry was rough and temporary-looking, if there was any comfort to be derived from that. The guard was heavy all around. Food was slid in through a tiny door, and garbage dragged out, and water continued to flow through the Daedalian plumbing. And that was all.

WHAT MATERIAL to use, to sculpt the thousand channels? It must be soft . . .

When he had a hundred cunning perforations built through a wing he tested it. Strapped it on and gave a strong, quick push down and it felt as if his arm had for a moment rested on something solid and ready to be climbed.

One clouded night when there were a thousand channels and he had decided the wings were ready, the father mounted into the sky. Ascending awkwardly and breathlessly at first, he soon learned to relax like a good swimmer. When some height had been attained, a long, gliding, coasting rest let the arm muscles recover before more work was necessary. In an hour, in air that was almost calm, he flew the length of the whole cloud-shrouded island, and was not winded or wearied. Then back toward the pinpoints of the House's lamps, which served to guide him home.

When he landed, the wings were warm, almost hot, with heat that had been gathered into their channels out

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of the air itself, and somehow turned to pushing force. Daedalus still had not the words or thoughts to make clear, even in his own mind, just how the wings worked. In daylight a strong push down with one completed wing, and you could see a vapor-puff big as a pumpkin appear in the beaten air and fly off rearward, spinning violently. Icarus extending a hand into the puff said he could feel the chill . . .

FOOD AND WATER and gold, in small quantities, they would carry at their belts. In daylight, across the sea to Sicily; a few hours should be enough. And they could turn northward, to the mainland, if they flew into difficulty. "In the morning, son. Now sleep."

. . . HE HAD NOT YET paid the price, but he knew that it would come. Squinting into the hot, rising run, he absently marked its dull sheen on Icarus' wings, and waited for the breath of wind to help them rise among the gulls.

—FRED SABERHAGEN

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Robert Thurston's recent stories for us have covered a number of bases, from the lightweight "The Haunted Writing Manual" (October, 1975) to the surreal "Groups" (February, 1976), with stops inbetween for "One Magi Ring, Used" (May, 1976). Now he describes a marital nightmare which leads to—

PARKER FRIGHTENED ON A TIGHTROPE

ROBERT THURSTON

Illustrated by Richard Olsen

PARKER sensed the topographical changes around him before he opened his eyes. They were not what he expected. Something was wrong.

"I'll keep my goddamned eyes shut," he shouted. To whomever it may have concerned.

But the sounds of cheap music piqued his already low-peaked curiosity and he opened an eyelid just a fraction. The blurred shape he saw was either a menacing animal waiting for him to view the attack or an odd-shaped rock shimmering in the heat. He shut the eye again and concentrated on the music. It was not, after all, cheap music. It was good music played atrociously. Old-fashioned tune, pre-war, pre-all-the-world-wars. Ragtime. Scott Joplin. *The Cascades* played like one of those rippled-light waterfalls on the cylindrical surface of a revolving novelty lampshade. He remembered that kind of lamp from his childhood. His father had owned one that displayed Tom Sawyer standing by his fishing pole and pissing in the lake. But that was ol' Dad, all right. Dad, of the don't - throw - cigarette- butts-in-the-toilet- we-don't-crap-in-your-ashtray school. Dad had been born with a straw hat and a bamboo cane, with a single goal in life, to find a pink plaster doll and marry her, which he had done with Ma. Thrown a hoop over her head and around her shoulders without touching them until it clanged onto the silver metal floor, all tilted hoops loose. Carried Ma home along with a carton of cigarettes, that ashtray, that lamp, and a partial set of Welcome-to-Atlantic-City-Steel-Pier China. And, except for the coming of Parker Jr., that was his life.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are," said a female voice which seemed only a short distance away. "I'll search you near, I'll search you far." A familiar voice? Whose? "Under sun or under star." A voice that he did not want to be able to identify. "In a box or in a car." It couldn't be Melinda. That would be too much

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bad luck all at one time. "Behind the altar or before the bar." Only Melinda could infuse doggerel with social superiority. " 'Neath the asphalt, in the tar; drunk at a funeral, pickled in a jar; in a sneeze, in catarrh. Under sail, pinned on spar, stars and bars, hussars, quar, lar, mar, nar, Par—

"—ker, open your eyes this minute. You know I don't have the patience to finish this kind of thing."

"I don't want to."

"Open Your Eyes."

He had always obeyed each of Melinda's second commands, this time was no exception. The amount of detail that he had to absorb, plus the intensity of light immediately surrounding him, made him blink several times before he could bring everything into focus. What he had earlier not been sure about was, indeed, a rock. A plump smooth-surfaced rock sitting on the edge of a cliff. The cliff was only a few steps away. He could not tell what it hung over the edge of—smoke rose from the valley or abyss or riverbed or whatever. From his cliff to the cliff across the way, where Melinda sat dangling her skinny legs over the edge, was a distance of about fifteen or twenty feet. Stretching from the rock to a point a few inches from Melinda's sensually-curved hips was a rope of modest dimensions. It hung, a bit more loose than taut, across the smoke-filled depression. Melinda was stroking the topside of the rope with the back of an angular hand—she had hands like dragon's paws, webbing just below the level of visibility. Parker could not see where the rope ended.

Melinda stretched out her legs, pointing her ballerina's toes at him, and arched her back. The action allowed the outline of her small breasts to appear beneath the loose dress she

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wore. As if suddenly conscious of the sexual effect that the appearance of her breasts provided, she drew back her legs and leaned slightly forward. One arm hugged the black silky material of the dress at the waist. Parker could remember the first time he had fondled her breasts. He had been furious at himself for wondering what it would be like to make love with a boy. When a woman had a face like Melinda's—eyes so fiery you could not concentrate on their color, lips so inviting, skin so soft—it was absurd to ponder homosexual love. Or maybe, considering Melinda's peculiar traits, it was not.

Mist, or perhaps more smoke, hugged the ground around Melinda. The only geographical feature he could see was a hill rising above the mist. On the hill, a tree-lined road led to what looked like a castle. The rest of the shapes appearing irregularly through the mist and smoke were indefinable, sometimes threatening.

"Interesting layout."

Melinda raised her legs from cliffside, removed her hand from the rope, and stretched her body along the cliff's edge. The rope now seemed to lead into and blend with her stark black hair.

"What did you say, Parker? Your feeble fumbling voice doesn't carry well across the gap."

"I said, this is an interesting layout. Different from what I'd do. Spooky but not unattractive."

"Blah but not unblah. One of your favorite constructions, it seems. Beaten but not unwhipped. Pretty but not beautiful—that's me, remember? Angular and curvy but not sexy—me, too. Clever but not intelligent—also me."

"I never said any of that."

"Not to me, no. Perhaps not to anybody. But they were inherent assumptions behind most of your attitudes."

"Not true."

"True but not factual."

Melinda sat up slowly. She seemed to rise without any apparent physical effort, twisting her upper torso like a charmed snake rising from a basket.

"Why are you here?" Parker said. "For that matter, where are we?"

She pulled at the rope, making sure it was secure. Parker could still not see whether it was attached to anything on her side.

"What do you remember?" she asked.

"What do I remember about what?"

"Where were you before? What's your most recent memory?"

Parker, stepping as if his path were strewn with repellent matter, walked toward the edge of the cliff. He looked up at the castle on the hill, to see if it would help to stir his memory.

"I don't recall anything special. Last I can think of, I was just at home, doing the kind of things I do at home. Reading the paper or watching the tube or fooling around with my new Mellophonic Orchillusia or—"

"Bingo!"

"What do you mean? This can't have anything to do with that. Besides, I don't recall creating any illusions with it and why would I create one like this anyway?"

"No—no, you were not fixing up one of the phony trips that I'm sure delights you. What's your specialty? You a cowboy on the plains? An astronaut on Mars? Or something more sexy?"

"You've been watching the ads too much. The Orchillusia is capable of some fine cultural, and culturally sedate, creations and recreations for the soothing of emotions, calming of the mind, and elevation of the spirit."

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"You've been reading the instruction booklet too much, sounds like. We both know why you, or anybody, needs the foolish panacea of an 'orchestrated illusion,' and it's rarely for any uplifting reasons, buster."

"I don't see what difference it makes what I use it for. And how in hell could you have any idea about the kind of orchestrated illusion I devise in the privacy of my own home?"

"Because I've invaded the privacy of your home. Because I've watched your foolish face as you sit at your Orchillusia, the wired skullcap on your head, the keyboard beneath your fingers. I've watched you smile foolishly as you've pressed the button for 'love' and I have seen your shoulders tense when you've pushed for 'suspense.' I've seen you hop up and down in the chair after pressing 'action,' laugh hysterically from 'comedy.' You play that stupid instrument like a three year old banging on a piano."

Melinda's hand motion for a three year old banging on a piano did strongly resemble Parker at the keyboard of his Orchillusia.

"Well, the hell with all that. I don't care how you think I look when I'm engaged in private activity. With all the hectic pressures of everyday life, and the hazards involved in outside pleasure-seeking, a man needs the satisfaction that can be obtained with the wondrous modern appliances designed to soothe his weary mind."

"Instruction booklet, page seven."

"You still haven't told me what this is all about. What does my Orchillusia have to do with my being here with you now? And where is this?"

"Work it out for yourself."

"Melinda . . ."

"Work it out."

Repeated command. Nothing to do but obey.

"Well, I remember looking forward to spending a pleasant evening, using the 'art' key in conjunction with the 'deep emotion' modulating button. But I don't exactly remember doing anything about it. I can see myself seated at the machine, activating it, but my memory stops there. That's it, I remember. I pressed the right keys and nothing happened. First I thought that the goddamned thing was broken and here I'd forgotten to send in the warranty card, as usual, and I was trying to recall where I'd put the card . . . and that's all I remember. I suppose the next thing I knew I was here and I sensed something was wrong and I didn't want to open my eyes to see what."

"Something *was* wrong. Me."

"You're always something wrong."

"You'll be sorry you said that. So, have you put everything together?"

"Are you kidding? All I know is that I was wafted away from a quiet evening in the privacy of my home and I wind up here and I don't know how the hell you did it."

Melinda sighed.

"You can never get from point A to point B without asking directions. First of all, I did not *waft* you anywhere. You are still at home, seated foolishly at your chintzy orchestrated illusion device, a look—let me check for a minute—"

Melinda disappeared for a second. She had returned before Parker could even consider going into shock about it.

"—a look of bemused stupidity on your face. Your wired skullcap is on at a rakish tilt and your fingers are still on 'art' and 'deep emotion.' "

"If this is 'art' and 'deep emotion' then some goddamned thing has gone haywire on the set. I told you I should have sent in that goddamned warranty card. I never get around to

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filling those things out. 'Course you always feel that nothing will break down because it never does when you *do* send in the warranty cards. Anyway, we all know that things are programmed to break down the day after the warranty expires. I never expected—"

"Parker! Shut up."

"Easy for you to shout at me. You always remember to take care of your correspondence. You never missed out on a warranty card in your life."

"That happens to be true, but not pertinent. Nothing has broken down in your stupid Orchillusia."

"If it's not broken, then what am I doing here?"

As soon as he had asked the question, he realized he did not want to hear the answer. Melinda obviously savored the answer as if it were dipped in sweet-tasting venom.

"It is not broken, but it *has* been tampered with."

"Tampered with? Melinda, I don't see—"

"A few wires here, a transistor there, a clutch of components, a bunch of relays—and suddenly I am wired into your precious instrument. Not only that, but your buttons and keys are attached to some new factors. Art is suddenly not art anymore. It's that castle, as a matter of fact. It's the one part of the scene that you contributed when you started to play. But even that has some effects of my tampering, wait'll you hear."

"I can't accept this. The Orchillusia is guaranteed. I selected what it could do according to my tastes, interests, likes and dislikes. Nothing can go wrong with it."

"Nothing has gone wrong. It works just fine. But it is working for me, my dear. I have controls of my own to go with the overhaul I've done on it. Anyway, what good is your guarantee if you didn't send in the warranty card?"

"Warranty cards do not control manufacturer's promises. And how could you have overhauled it? You were never able to tell a screwdriver from a sexual toy."

"I never said a screwdriver looked anything like you. And how would you know about my mechanical aptitudes? You always assumed what women could and could not do, and would not have the slightest idea whether or not I could use a screwdriver."

"I understand what liberation is all about, and I always treated you straight arrow. I was quite fair, didn't treat you like a woman at all."

"There's some truth in that assertion all right."

"And what does a screwdriver looking like me have to do with anything?"

"Everything, my dear, everything."

Melinda's chiding reminded Parker of the state of things just before they had split up a year or so ago. Everything she said in those days was either cryptic, confused, or muddled with sarcasm.

"You want to hear about the castle?"

Her voice was soft, almost cooing.

"Okay, castle."

"It's neat. Keen, I might say if I were limited to your vocabulary. I'm in all the rooms of the castle. Isn't that spiffy? Come to think of it, I do seem to be limited to your vocabulary."

"What are you talking about?"

"The castle is filled with Melindas. But, and how is this for a touch, they are not all Melinda as I am now. If you wander through it, if you do get to wander through it, you might encounter me in any stage of my life. For example, you might go into the

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parlor—do castles have parlors?—anyway, you might go there and find me as I was when you first met me, at least the way you perceived me then. I would probably be soft, shy, demure, willing to listen to your point of view, very careful about the way I present my point of view, sexually naive. Think of that, you meet me at that stage and you might deflower me all over again. Huzzah, eh, Parker?"

Memories of the younger Melinda had often come to him in the previous year, when he had tried to analyze why she had left him. Looking at her now, he remembered also that, in-spite of his pleasant memories of their past, he was quite glad that she had gone.

"Or you might find me at an earlier stage. How about when I was, say, fifteen. Nubile and innocent, as they say. You could have a lot of fun deceiving me as I was then, lying to this slightly-plump pretty child who believes that people cannot possibly like her because they never even talk to her. Or you—"

"Stop that, Melinda. How can you—I wouldn't think of attacking you in such a way. When you're young and innocent, I mean. I wouldn't—"

"Wouldn't you? Do you mean that there is not a sexual fantasy buried somewhere beneath those matted locks that would include child molesting, especially if I were the child? Come now, at some time or other everybody thinks of everything foul, and usually in some ways desires it."

"Maybe *you* do, if you're capable of ideas like that, but certainly not everybody, certainly not me."

"Well, we'll pass on that. I'm not through explaining the castle. You can find me as I was at any stage you knew me. My grad-student socially involved stage, perhaps you'll find that version in the kitchen. How about my nervous breakdown stage? You'll love soothing me, patting my wrist and telling me everything is all right, talking me out of a perfectly-logical suicide. I imagine you'll find that version of me in a linen closet somewhere in the castle dungeon. Or do they have linen closets in castle dungeons? Anyway, I used to hide in closets when things got—"

"Melinda, will you—"

"I've programmed a really terrific variation on the principle. Not only do you have hundreds of versions of me as I was in the past, but I've also thrown in at no extra charge some projected versions of myself as I may age. Even some alternate possibilities. How about a comfortably over-fifty Melinda, a little fleshed out, but still with the old pizzazz, grey haired, fire in the furnace and all that? Hubba hubba, eh, Parker?"

She was talking faster now, always the case when she warmed up to a subject. Parker could remember times when she had started out a social evening in a dark corner of the room, almost refusing to talk to anybody even if she was addressed, then throwing in an occasional observation until people were looking to her for her next commentary, at which time she would start developing lines of thought until finally she was dominating the conversation. Nobody, except Parker, ever realized that she followed this pattern purposefully.

"Melinda, let's stop all this. Punch 'dissolve' and we can talk things over with a couple of drinks, instead of all this—"

"No, Parker. It took a long while for me to read up and master the mechanics of an Orchillusia. I even had to perform a little industrial espionage in order to find out how to reprogram your machine. Funny little guy, the guy who I coaxed the plans

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out of. Had a set of ethics, company style. Said that an orchestrated illusion device, he always called it a device, was geared so much to the individual purchaser that it might be dangerous to make drastic changes, might drive the purchaser out of his mind. I assured him, of course, that I did not plan any drastic changes. I couldn't let him know that I wanted to crack your skull in about forty-three places. He believed me. People do."

"So I've noticed."

"And so I can't just cut things off here. Not what I want to cut anyway. Let's get to the big main-ring act here. You notice the tightrope?"

She nudged the rope lightly with a foot, to show how much slackness the rope had.

"I see it."

"You're to walk across it. Or see if you can walk across it."

Parker raised his hands in a gesture which he hoped was insulting.

"What makes you think that I will do anything you say?"

"I'm in control of the keyboard."

"Big deal. I'm still me. I still have free will. I can still fight you. I—"

"Free will, eh? Maybe, maybe not. When not everything is determined, and I've not determined everything, but some of it is—is what's left over free will?"

"If I choose not to walk across that tightrope, that pretty much blows your whole argument."

"But you will walk across my rope."

An animal roared. The sound came from behind Parker. He turned but saw at first only mist like the mist surrounding Melinda. Then he was aware of vague shapes which seemed to be prowling just beyond the point of a clear view. A different, more frightening, roar came from a different point. One roar led to another. Soon there was a jungle-like cacophony coming at him from three sides. It sounded also as if some of the creatures were pawing the ground in preparation for a charge or rampage. Parker shuddered. The realism of the illusion was as good as anything Parker had dreamed up in his experiments with the new machine.

"One of my pets out there has the longest, sharpest-pointed teeth you ever saw, Parker. Another has lousy teeth, all blunt and uneven, but he does have one thing going for him. Determination. I might let him get you."

"Don't dramatize, Melinda. None of this is real. You treat it as if—"

"Pain is real. When my pets get through with you, you will remember what they've done. And this real is better than the usual, because I can do it to you all over again."

"Got you there. I arranged for a governor to be installed in the machine to forestall any pain that might have occurred in my own creations. I can not be hurt, the Orchillusia will not allow it, so—"

"So I fixed that. Simple little bypass, and the pain is real, intense, and memorable. Onto the tightrope, Parker."

"I can't."

"Prancer! Dancer! Rikki-tikki-tavvi!"

Three of Melinda's animals growled and began to advance. Parker could almost make out detail. Horns and claws and teeth. He hated teeth.

"Wait a second. Let's think this out. I can't walk that tightrope."

"And why the hell not?"

"I have no sense of balance. I can't even walk a sidewalk straight. I'm forever finding myself stepping on grass or slipping off the curb."

"Nonsense. Here you have new

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abilities. Try it, see how wide the rope is, at least triple the thickness of the circus variety. My God, you could take a stroll on it three sheets to the wind. Besides, it's worth the attempt. All the fun's over here on my side. Think of the castle and its thousand resident Melindas. Hotsy-totsy, eh, Parker?"

"Melinda, I—"

"Onto the tightrope!"

Parker's left foot responded automatically to her command. His first step set the rope to swaying, as if in a stiff wind. He froze, one foot on land, the other on the rope. The growls behind him became louder and blended, almost naturally, with the sound of Melinda's voice sending encouragement.

Well, what was he scared of really? It wasn't as if something bad could happen to him. So he tried to walk a tightrope across an illimitable abyss, what could go wrong in an orchestrated illusion, after all? Melinda could go wrong, that was what could go wrong. Swallowing hard, he took the second step and was completely on the rope. Again it swayed, and he moved his right foot backward towards land.

"No, no, Parker. No retreatsies. This ain't sex, buster, you got to stay with it."

Flailing his arms as he struggled to maintain balance, he simultaneously felt fury at the Melinda's insinuation.

"Melinda . . . can't you . . . ever . . . forgive . . "

"That is hilarious. For three years forgiveness was what I did best. I gave you forgiveness each time your poodle-dog blue eyes asked for it. Demanded is more the word. I forgave you for failing me. 'Dear, it's my fault, I hold you back, you could be anything you wanted to be, it'll be all right next time, I'll support you in every way, don't you worry your little head.' I forgave you your petty fits, your sophisticated bigotries, your taste for pallid music. I forgave you for not forgiving me."

The rope had gentled down. As long as he stood still, he felt he had a chance of standing on it.

"Very good, love, very good. See, you've managed the beginning, now let's find out if you can finish something you start, for a change."

"I can understand your hating me, but what I can't understand—"

"Watch it!"

The rope had weaved like a snake. Parker's left foot slipped off for a moment, and he veered from side to side, but he found it easy to renew his position.

"What I can't understand is your hating me."

"What? I think you'd better rephrase."

"Why? I was perfectly clear. You just never deal with what you don't want to hear."

"That may be true. However, what you just told me is that you could understand my hating you, but could not understand my hating you."

"That's not what I said at all."

"It is exactly what you said."

"I did not."

"We'd better stop this or, in a minute, I'll find myself forgiving you. Forget the argument. Just tell me what you intended to say to me before the communication breakdown."

"I *said*, I could understand your hating me, but what I could not understand—what I could not understand—"

"What's the matter?"

Parker steadied himself on the rope and tried to look as dignified as he could under the circumstances.

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"I can't remember what I was trying to say."

Melinda laughed.

"That's not fair. You've got me all nerves, standing on this dumb rope, you mocking me at every turn. I can be expected a memory lapse."

"You mean you can be forgiven a memory lapse."

"I didn't mean that at all."

"Screw off. Take another step."

"I think I'll just stand where I am. You don't have the control you think you have."

"My version of Rikki-tikki-tavvi has sharp teeth; like the original, is fond of eating snakes; and can walk tightropes. Rikki, pet, yoo-hoo—"

Setting his left foot for balance, Parker raised his right and started moving it around the left. For a moment the rope seemed more jump- than tight-, and he felt himself slipping. Before his body had nearly folded itself, he got the right foot securely in front of the left. He straightened up, to Melinda's understated applause.

"Good, you're already doing one hundred percent better than I'd thought you would. Keep walking before you lose the rhythm."

"You know I was never athletic. Let's stop this."

"I remember you telling me you could always take care of yourself. I remember clearly you saying that. In a pinch, you said. And then you pinched me."

"Hilarious."

"At the time I laughed politely. An early-in-the-courtship laugh."

"I was never that gross. Maybe unsophisticated, but not gross."

"Take a gross step. Before the wind comes up."

"Wind?"

"Well, gale, really."

Parker tried to lift his left foot. He was not surprised that he could not budge it. The rope bobbed. Straining, he slid the left foot a little closer to the heel of his right foot, but still could not make it take that step.

"You look terrified, Parker."

"No."

"Come on now."

"Frightened, but not terrified. I refuse to be terrified just for the purpose of your little game."

"Then get the hell moving!"

Her shrillness startled him, and he lost balance. First his left foot, then the right, slid off the rope. He twisted in midair and made a grab at the rope, but his fingertips merely brushed against the rough hempen surface. If he could have untensed his falling body enough to shrug, he would have. After all, this was only an orchestrated illusion. This fall would be no worse than everybody's recurring dream about falling. Probably he would wake up before he hit ground. Or perhaps Melinda would program a cartoonlike collision with a surface. Something like the way the coyote in the roadrunner films fell. Several miles and then a crash into the ground, leaving a hole-silhouette of himself with cracks reaching out from it. Well, he could take a little pain as long as he knew it wasn't real. It would be a forgettable pain. With this conclusion, he almost relaxed into the fall, when a trampoline appeared from the side of the cliff below him. He hit its canvas surface with some velocity. The resulting bounce sent him flying higher than the tightrope. As he reached the top of his arc, and started downwards, he heard Melinda laughing. He landed on the tightrope on his stomach, then hung there for several minutes while he fought to regain his breath.

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"Good landing, Parker. Flaps down and everything."

"What's . . .what's the idea of the trampoline?"

"For one thing, it saves you from the big fall, at least until I'm ready for it. I figured that, with your sense of balance, you were bound to fall off the rope almost immediately. And besides that, it's got a dandy tape-loop attachment built into it. If I choose to activate it for—"

"What are you talking about now?"

"The experimental part."

"Experimental? What could you do that's experimental with a sophisticated piece of machinery like the Orchillusia?"

"You're treating me like the dunce who would not know an orchestrated illusion device from a screwdriver again."

"I don't intend that. Tell me your, whatever, experiment."

"The tape-loop. It's a principle they don't put in their ad copy. Nor is it that easy to do. What it is: an act can be programmed to repeat itself indefinitely and each time the act will be exactly the same. Think of it, Parker. What pleasure! What security! How'd you like to spend a perfect fifteen minutes with the world's greatest courtesan over and over again? Defeat your bitterest enemy in delicious repetition? What every man has always wanted, to capture the moment intensely and repeatedly, instead of having to deal with it as a vague memory or weak fantasy. Are you going to hang tummy-down on that rope forever?"

"I, uh, await your instructions."

"Oh, neat. Well, hang loose for a second. I want to tell you. The tape-loop thing, it's great so long as you've got it in control, if you program it to repeat itself a certain number of times, or enlist somebody to turn it off for you at a specific time. But one little bug they haven't been able to iron out and that is: if the tape-loop is engaged and there's no provision made for turn-off, in theory—in *theory* at the old experimental lab—the subject could be thrust off into a veritable limbo of repetition."

"I almost follow you, but I don't quite—"

"Just this. One of my tape-loops that I could engage at my choice sets off an astonishing display of exercises on the trampoline below. If I choose to engage it and then take off for parts unknown, you would find yourself quite an able acrobat doing flips and twists in the same pattern over and over. *And* be conscious of the repetitiveness of it all. There you'd be, out in eternity doing back flips and nobody would know. Until, at least, somebody showed up to remove you from your machine, or the power is cut off or something. And who knows when that'll happen? It's a three-day weekend, Parker, and you can get in a lot of back-flips in three days. And the *theory*, the experimental-lab *theory*, is that the subject would not walk away from the Orchillusia as much of the man he was when he started. That's a serious drawback, my company man said. The company is in fear that some consumer advocate is going to come around and shut off the profits. And after all, they argue, nothing's gone wrong yet, *nobody's* actually *used* such a tape-loop maliciously. Till now. But I'm willing, for the advance of science and all. What do you think? Hasty pudding, eh, Parker?"

"I think, given the circumstances, I might prefer an eternity of back flips."

"I'll keep that in mind. Meantime,

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climb back on the rope."

"Oh, Melin—"

"C'mon. You'll find it easy."

He did find it easy. First he twisted his body around until it lay along the rope, then he pulled himself up to a straddling position, and then, accompanied by a vivid memory of watching a high-wire act, he agilely sprang to a standing position. He swayed to one side, but steadied himself with grace. He thought he heard a couple of bravos in the distance.

"I heard you had a thing with Roger," he said.

"I heard you had a thing with Celeste."

"Not much of a thing."

"Roger was less than a thing."

"I thought so."

"So did Celeste."

Parker dared a forward step. It went well, so he tried another.

"You know I was a week in the hospital after you left?"

"Tonsilitis?"

He took another step. It was really getting easier.

"No, different kind of hospital. I had a complete nervous breakdown."

"Complete?"

"Pretty much."

"Sorry I missed it."

"I do encores."

"Maybe we can do a split week."

He took the next couple of steps more quickly.

"The day after I was released from the hospital I slept with your best friend."

"Charles?"

"No, Shirley."

"You'd've been better off with Charles."

"Shirley said I was the best."

"She drinks diet-colas, too."

He nearly misstepped, but then turned the mistake into a faster pace.

"In a fit of depression I crashed the car into a light-pole."

"Oh? Where?"

"347 Norwalk Avenue."

"Good address."

"Totalled the car."

"Sorry I missed it."

"I do encores."

"Come back when you got experience, kid."

Now that he was more than halfway across the rope, the rest looked easy. Melinda appeared to be impressed.

"You've mastered an art, Parker. I never thought you could do this well. I guess I still bring out the old competitive urges, eh?"

"I don't give a damn about competition. That's for total wipeouts, not for me." Melinda laughed. "I am mastering the tightrope for the sake of mastering the tightrope, has nothing to do with you. Then—then—"

He started to wobble from side to side. The rope trembled beneath him.

"Then what, Parker?"

"Then I'll face the next test, whatever you've planned."

"There are . . . possibilities. And then?"

"You'll get tired. First your hands will start moving, smoothing out wrinkles in your dress, playing with strands of your hair, pulling at hair with your fingers, touching your face as if to shape it. Then you'll stop watching what I'm doing and look toward the ground like a penitent. Oh, you won't *be* penitent, you'll just look that way. Soon I'll have to keep interrupting you to find out what you've programmed next, and you'll probably have forgotten. There'll be tears in your eyes, more from weariness than remorse. And you'll find it's too much of a strain to come up with a witticism to fling at me, and you'll grow silent. Eventually you'll give up and leave

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and I'll find myself at the keyboard of my machine, my hands still holding onto the same two buttons. You'll be gone, and I won't like that. But it'll be bearable. I don't know of anything that's not bearable."

Melinda smiled. "Jesus goddamn, I wish I could stop your self-pity."

"Where was the self-pity in that? Seemed to me it was an objective—"

"I know, I know, and you were talking about me, not yourself. You work self-pity into nooks and crannies, let it tarnish the edges of what you say. It's not even in your tone of voice, you keep that elegantly under control. It's just there. It's what killed us. I don't know, it—"

"You and your need to intellectualize our relationship, like incidentally you're doing now, that's what killed it. We needed to get beyond intellectualizing—"

"And self-pity."

"Well, maybe that, too."

"Well, we didn't."

"No."

"Some people don't."

Parker had the rope well under control. Its slight swaying now seemed natural to him.

"Melinda, I'm willing to try again, if you—"

"No!"

"It would only—"

"No!"

"Then why are you here? Why are you doing this? Revenge is not your style and—"

"I don't know. I like to play with new toys. My Friday night sewing circle got cancelled. This is my machine and you're running the program. I don't know. I just want to."

"Then I win."

"Hell you do."

The rope began to sway again. He fell forward, and wound up squatting with both hands and feet on the rope.

"Forget all this, Melinda. You can't hurt me."

"Hell I can't!"

"Okay, you can. But there's no reason to continue this. We can talk things over, over wine."

"That cheap wine of yours? That's vinegar given a blue ribbon by corrupt winetasters."

"Well, whatever. This can stop. It—"

"That's a matter for dispute, I guess. Finish the rope-walking."

She started to laugh. Mocking laughter. It pleased him.

"This is like old times," he said.

"You bet your sweet sideburns! Stand up and finish the walk."

"Yes, I goddamned will. I goddamn Jesus Christ in limbo will."

Parker gradually stood up with great effort, pain, and skill. Taking a deep breath, he plunged forward and walked the rest of the tightrope wordlessly. At something close to a run. As he reached ground, he fell. Looking back, he saw that the rope, freed of its burden, swung from side to side in a wide arc. He looked up at Melinda. She was still laughing. For the first time since he'd started the tightrope-walking, he noticed the ragtime music in the background. Perhaps Melinda had turned it up. Her cheeks were unnaturally red, probably from the laughter. The color reminded him of the rouge on his pink plaster doll mother.

"What are you grinning at, Parker?"

"You look like my mother. Right now, that is. For a moment. Just another illusion. An illusion, is all. Stop glaring at me like that!"

"There is no way I can get you, is there? I mean, really get you. Expose your soul, hurt you. You're invulner-

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able."

"I don't know what you mean. Seems to me you hurt me, *get* me, at every opportunity."

"That ain't nothing. I can needle you, prod you, even make you walk tightropes. But you don't allow me that last little bit, the inch or so that means real pain. That's what I mean. Invulnerability. I could hang you by your toes—in reality, I mean, not in a stupid illusion provider—and you'd jabber until you were dead. I can't destroy you, ever."

"Maybe not. Is it really that important?"

"Yes, God damn it, it is."

"It's not like you. Revenge, malice, destruction—"

"Oh, it *is* like me. You don't know. It's what's left to me. Revenge, destruction, or go back to you."

"Then come back to me."

"No! Never that! A thousand times no! No, you've got to be vulnerable somewhere, that's got to be the easier way."

"But I'm invulnerable."

"Damn it, yes!"

"Just like you."

"You say so."

"Irresistible force."

"Right."

"Immovable object."

"Right again."

"But which?"

"Which what?"

"Which is which? Which is me? Which you?"

"That's very melodic."

"But we must define, it's important."

"It's—no—oh, never mind. I can't stay. I've done what I came to do. And a woman's got to do what a woman's got to do. So maybe I can leave for good this time. Maybe not. Maybe I'll be back. Maybe I'll figure a way to affect that last little bit—inch of pain. Or maybe you can hit mine in some way."

"Wait, what about the castleful of Melindas?"

"Forget it. I just said that."

"Or try the tape-loop."

"Lied about that, too. That sort of thing's impossible with a two-bit machine like this. I checked."

"They why did you—"

"At this point, I'll try anything. Goodbye, Parker."

"No, don't leave, stay for—"

"Look, Parker, you win, aren't you satisfied?"

"No, damn it, I'm not!"

Melinda smiled, the kind of smile he'd been hoping to see again since the day she'd left him. Before that, really.

"Well, that's something," she said, and disappeared.

It seemed to him that he lay on the cliffside for a long time, then suddenly he realized that he no longer felt dirt underneath him. In its place was the Orchillusia keyboard, and it was uncomfortable, painful. In the manner of a person startled awake, he looked quickly around the room. Everything was in place. There was no trace of Melinda anywhere. For a moment he wondered if he had programmed the Orchillusia himself for the appearance of Melinda. No, it could not have been his own program. She had done it. She had been here. Vaguely he recalled soft footsteps behind him when he had first sat down at the machine.

He wished she had waited. For a brief time, as he examined her absence, he felt that perhaps she had, after all, reached that last little inch of pain that she'd mentioned. But of course she had not.

—ROBERT THURSTON

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BRIAN LUMLEY

Readers who may have been puzzled by the controversy over Fritz Leiber's review of Brian Lumley's The Burrowers Beneath *(June, 1975) are herewith presented with a brand new Lumley story (not a part of the Lovecraftian Mythos) in which occurs the confrontation of—*

THARQUEST AND THE LAMIA ORBIQUITA

Illustrated by Doug Beekman

From Teh Atht's *Legends of the Olden Runes,* as translated by Thelred Gustau from the Theem'hdra Manuscripts.

I

NOW THARQUEST the wandering Klühnite, riding hard from Eyphra in the West where he had angered the High Priest of the Dark Temple of Ghatanothoa by getting his lately-virgin daughter with child, came over the Mountains of Lohmi and spied the once-gilded spires and great walls of Chlangi. Aye, even crumbling Chlangi, which is called the Shunned City.

Not unfairly is Chlangi named, for indeed her approaches—aye, and her walls, streets and deserted houses—they are shunned. Even now, though many years are fled since the olden runes were writ, still they are shunned . . . In Chlangi a robber-king ruled over a rabble of yeggs and sharpers, exacting taxation from the scabby whores and unscrupulous taverners in his protection and allowing such to vend in peace those poisons peculiar to their trades.

And Tharquest frowned when he saw the city; for some twenty years gone when scarce a child he had visited the place, which was then wondrous in its opulence and splendid in the colour and variety of visitors come to admire its wonders. Then the city had been abustle with honest, thronging merchants, and the wineshops and taverns had sold vintages renowned throughout the known world—especially the pure clear wine pressed with skill from Clangi's own glass-grapes. The domes and spires had been gilded over; the high walls white with fresh paint; the roofs red with tiles baked in the ovens of busy builders, and all in all Chlangi had been the jewel of Theem'hdra's cities.

But now the city was shunned by all good and honest men, had been so for ten years, since first the lamia Orbiquita builded her castle nine miles to the north on the fringe of the Desert of Sheb. In that time the gold had been stripped from all the rich roofs; aye, and the vines of the glass-grapes beyond the north wall had grown wild and barren and gross so as to flatten their rotting trellises.

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Arches and walls had fallen into disrepair, and the waters of the aqueducts were long grown stagnant and green with slime. Only the rabble horde and their robber-king now occupied the city within its great walls, and without those walls the ravenous beggars prowled and scavenged for whatever meager pickings there might be.

And yet Tharquest feared not as he rode his black mare down from the Mountains of Lohmi, for his departure from Eyphra had been of necessity swift and he carried little of value. Even his mare—which he had stolen—wore no saddle upon her back, and her rein was of rope and the bit in her mouth of hard wood.

Most disreputable, Tharquest looked, with his robes torn and dishevelled in the flight from Zothala's father and his eyes all baggy from many a sleepless night's riding. Still, he had a friend in Chlangi: Dilquay Noth, once an adventurer like himself and now a pimp for the city's less loathsome whores. At Dilquay's place he knew he would find food and shelter for the night. Then, in the morning, he would press on for Klühn on the coast, where a rich widow-wife awaited his caresses. In any case, he doubted if the High Priest of Dark Ghatanathoa would follow him here—not into the supposed sphere of ensorcellment of the lamia Orbiquita.

Himself, Tharquest had small faith in spells and enchantments—what little he had seen of such had been the quackery of village tricksters and stage magicians—and yet indeed in those days such things were. As in all inchoate worlds, Nature had not yet decided which gifts and talents she would let her creatures keep. Or rather, she had experimented and decided that there were lines better not

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continued. Slowly these discarded strains were disappearing, but every now and then one would be born seventh son of a seventh son of a wizard. And he too, if he remembered the keys, might inherit in addition to the usual five Nature's tossed-aside talents. Aye, and there were strangely endowed women, too.

So Tharquest came to Chlangi, and seeing the encampments of beggars without the walls and the way their narrow, hungry eyes gleamed as they fastened on the black flanks of his mount, he quickened the mare's step until his torn cloak belled in the sun and dust behind him. But the beggars made no move to molest him and he passed them through.

Into the evening city rode Tharquest, through the rotting wooden remnant of what had once been the mighty West Gate. Then, passing carelessly under a crumbling arch, he was knocked from the back of his mount by a robber who clung spider-like to the high stonework. Down he went and into the dust, to be hauled dazedly to his feet and disarmed by two more brigands before being dragged before robber-king Fregg.

When Fregg heard Tharquest's tale of his escape from the raging Priest of Ghatanothoa he laughed, and his cut-throat courtiers with him. Why! This Klühnite was obviously a brigand no less than they! They liked him for it and directed him out of Fregg's sagging pile—which was once a most magnificent palace—and on his way to find his friend Dilquay Noth the pimp.

Dilquay, he soon discovered, was doing well, living in a house not far from the palace wherein he kept his girls. Well-fortified the place and seated atop a small hill, like a castle in its own right and necessarily so; for pimping is a dodgy business in any city, and surely more so in Chlangi the Shunned . . .

Tharquest approached the great stone house—once the High Court of the long fled King Terrathagon, now the brothel of Dilquay Noth—up a flight of winding, basalt steps, arriving at a great iron-studded door with a little gated window. A rap or two at the oaken panels with the pommel of his simple sword brought bright blue eyes that peered from within. A gasp of recognition . . . and the door was at once thrown open. There in the spacious doorway, the burly, bearded Dilquay Noth.

"Tharquest the Wanderer, by my beard!—and bruised and banged about to boot! By all the Dark Gods, but you look beaten, my friend. In and sit you down and tell me how come your clothes are torn and you face unshaven, you who live by your pretty looks!"

But for all his words Dilquay was not overly surprised by Tharquest's sudden appearance in Chlangi. Some nine months gone, when he had heard from a wandering beggar how Tharquest had taken the Sacred Oath of Ghatanothoa to be admitted as a novice to the priesthood in Eyphra, he had straightway sent the same beggar with a note to the adventurer telling of his whereabouts and demanding an explanation. What on Earth was Tharquest—the hero of many a grand defloration—thinking of, Dilquay had wanted to know, binding himself to a Dark God and swearing continence for ever?

Thus, when Tharquest's troubles came to a head in Eyphra—or when they came to a belly, as it were—and when the Priestess Zothala's size had finally given away the Klühnite's real reason for desiring a bed within the

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Temple of Ghatanothoa, then the wanderer had stolen a mare and made for Clangi, to the friend who would succor him and see him on his way to Klühn and the bright blue sea . . .

Now, seated in Dilquay's spacious apartment—better appointed, Tharquest noted, than even Fregg's hall in the fast-falling palace—they swapped memories of olden adventures. Finally the bearded pimp told of how, after leaving Tharquest's side to settle with Titi the Whore, he had talked her into giving up her trade and opening a brothel of her own with Dilquay himself to protect her rights. That had been four years earlier, at a time when Chlangi's streets had still been fairly well filled, but now Dilquay was thinking of leaving the city. This was not, as he explained, for fear of the lamia Orbiquita, but simply for scarcity of trade.

It was at this juncture that Titi the ample entered; aye, even legendary Titi of a Thousand Delights. Straightway she fell on Tharquest and gave his neck a hug, crying: "Ah!—but I knew that our wanderer, who can sell his services to any hot-blooded woman in all the known world, could never settle to the servicing of a mere God! Why!—I've girls here would pay *you*, if they knew what I know—except you wouldn't look at them twice, not even for money!" she laughed.

"Titi," cried Tharquest, struggling from her grasp. "By Ghatanothoa's defiled temple, but you're more beautiful than ever!" He was lying, for Titi had never been beautiful, but there was a camaraderie between them and it was good to see the face—even the slightly pockmarked face—of so old a friend.

And so, after much drinking and chewing and chatting, came the night. Dilquay and Titi went off to organize their ladies and Tharquest, well feasted of meat and drunk of not unreasonable wine, found himself tucked up in a clean bed in a room of his own. In his reeling, boozy head before he slept, he kept hearing Dilquay's tales of the lamia Orbiquita, and in his lecherous soul there burned a drunken plan for yet another amorous adventure . . .

Dilquay had pointed out to Tharquest the fact that none of Chlangi's robber-men were handsome, and few of them young, and had then gone on to explain why. The lamia Orbiquita had taken all of the strong, young, good-looking men for herself and had left the city on the battle-scarred brigands and whore-poxed pirates who now inhabited her. This was why, Dilquay said, Tharquest himself must soon move on or attract Orbiquita's attention. For the lamia lusted like a succubus after handsome, strong-limbed young men, and was not above stealing into Chlangi in the dead of night on bat wings to lure off the occasional handsome wanderer she might hear was staying there.

She was said, too, to be beautiful, this lamia—but evil as the pit itself! Aye, and it was known that the beauty men saw in her was only an illusion, that the real Orbiquita was a well-poxed horror saved from the rot of centuries only by her own magical machinations. Furthermore, it was told that should any man have strength of will enough to resist the lamia once she had set her black heart upon him, then that he could carry off with him all of the hoarded treasures hidden away within her castle.

. . . Now *that* would be a real adventure!

II

IN THE MORNING, lying abed while

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he properly thought the thing out, finally Tharquest made his decision. He would visit this lamia and stay the night, and the following morn would leave her unsated taking her treasures with him. Dilquay and Titi paled on hearing of this brash scheme, but they could not deter Tharquest with even the direst tales.

When later that same day the robber-king also heard of the Klühnite's plans, he laughed and wished him luck and gave him back his twice-stolen mare. Thus, following a midday meal at Dilquay's, Tharquest set off through the fallen North Gate and pointed his mount's nose toward the Desert of Sheb. And in their encampments the beggars who saw him take his departure tittered and slapped lean thighs, debating upon how soon the wanderer's mare would come galloping back alone, lathered and red-eyed, and how that then there would be meat again in the camps of the ragged starvelings . . .

AFTER EIGHT MILES, by which time the castle of Orbiquita was a dark-spired outline against the early horizon—an outline reflecting neither beam of sunlight nor, indeed, any light at all, standing magically shaded even in the hot sun—Tharquest came to a shepherd's cot. He was thirsty by then and so tethered his mare and knocked upon the door of the rude dwelling. Pleasantly surprised was he when the door was opened by a young and gorgeous girl of long limbs, raven hair and great green eyes that looked upon him coyly as their owner bade him enter.

So Tharquest entered and seated himself and was given water. Then, his thirst quenched, he asked of the girl her man's whereabouts. His question came of sheer habit, for in Tharquest's life men—particularly husbands—were hazards to be avoided wherever possible. But she only laughed (showing teeth like pearls) and twirled girlishly about (showing limbs like marble cut by a master sculptor) and told him that she had no man. She lived with her father who was out after strayed sheep and not expected back for two days at least.

Now any man would have been tempted, and Tharquest sorely so, but he wanted to get on and reach Orbiquita's castle and earn his fortune. Remembering this through the flesh-lust that suddenly gripped him, he stood up and begged the lady's pardon but he must be gone, at which she bowed low (displaying breasts curved and golden as the full moon) and inquired of his destiny. On discovering Tharquest's intentions her great green eyes opened very wide and she all but burst into tears, deploring his plans for wealth and greatness and pleading with him thus:

"Oh, wanderer, you are surely handsome and strong and brave—but yet more surely are you mad! Know you not the *power* of this lamia?"

"I have heard," Tharquest answered, "how Orbiquita has the means to show herself as a great and ravishing beauty, when in truth she is ugly and ancient and loathsome. But I have also heard how, if a man resist her enticements—presented succubus-like in the night—he might walk off unscathed in the light of day with all the treasure he can carry. Aye, even with the wonderful treasures of her grim castle. This I intend to do, for the lamia can only take her victims during those hours when the sun is down, and I do not intend to sleep. I shall stay awake and keenly

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attentive, wary of all things within yon castle's walls."

"Oh, Tharquest, Tharquest," she pleaded. "I have seen so many such as you pass by here, though none so godly of form, and have given them water to succor them on their way. But—"

"Aye, go on, lass."

"Always it is the same. They go to the castle full of high inspiration and bravado, but only their horses—flanks lathered, eyes burning red in awful fear—ever return! For the lamia is never satisfied with a *piece* of a man but takes him all; fuel for her fires of lust and horror. No, you must not go to the castle, fair Tharquest, but stay here with me and share my bed this night. Aye, for I'm lonely here and often afraid. And in the morning, then return you whole and happy to the Shunned City; and perhaps, if I who have little experience of men please you, take me with you. . . ?"

And again Tharquest was warmed and felt a great temptation. But here he had a novel thought: was he not yet to be tempted by the lamia Orbiquita herself? And must he not resist such temptation for his life? Why!—if a mere shepherd girl might so readily set his senses spinning, what chance would he have against the succubus-like creature of the castle? No, let the girl be criterion for his intended night's continence; and Tharquest, swinging himself athwart the black flanks of his mare, laughed as he offered up a blasphemous blessing to Dark Ghatanothoa.

"May your gods protect you then, Tharquest," the girl called after his belling, tattered cloak.

"I have no gods," he called back, "save perhaps Shub-Niggurath, black ram with a thousand ewes." And he laughed.

"I'll wait for you," she cried. "Then, should you win your riches, your continence need not be extended beyond endurance . . ."

A SHORT WHILE later Tharquest came to the lamia's castle. The brooding, shrouded pile was girt around with strangely motionless trees, and as the wanderer had noted from afar, even standing in the sun it was oddly shaded. Beneath the trees by a narrow, silent streamlet he tethered his mare, proceeding on foot across the moat to the massive door. With the castle's turreted spires looming darkly above, he felt more than a little afraid, and he peered cautiously in at the open door. All was gloom and cobwebby dimness within, but the thought of the great reward soon to be his and the knowledge that the lamia only took her lusty nourishment at night bore up the wandering Klühnite's spirits.

Slowly he explored each room of the place, cellars to lofty spires, and as he did so his eyes grew more accustomed to the dimness and showed him a weird and singular thing. Each of the castle's rooms contained a bed of the finest cushions and silks, and at the foot of each bed great piles of clothing lay. There were boots and sandals and buskins; cloaks and capes, jackets and jerkins; trews, kilts and breeches; turbans hoods and fancy tiffers; shirts and kerchiefs and gauntlets and every thinkable item of manly attire—but nothing suitable for a woman. Why!—here were wardrobes for a hundred, nay, two hundred men . . . But where were those men? Who had they been?

Again Tharquest became sore afraid, glancing nervously about him, holding tight to the pommel of his simple sword and thinking on what he

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knew of the queen of this shadowed and unpeopled pile, the lamia Orbiquita. Dilquay had told him how, though she only took her prey at night, she would often assume human form in the hours of daylight to forage about and spy out the land for suitable victims. Possibly that was what she was even now about, and, heartened by the thought that he was at least alone in the castle, Tharquest engaged upon a systematic search of the place for the treasure fabled to lie hidden therein.

Long into the afternoon he searched, finding neither jewels, gold nor wealth of any sort; neither priceless miniatures nor gilt-framed masterpieces. Not a single solitary coin did he find, but he did come across a room in which a great table stood fresh prepared and laden as for a banquet. There were great platters of meat and smaller dishes containing toothsome morsels and sweetmeats; flagons of white, red and green wine, and one as pure and clear (or so the wandered thought) as the glass-grape wine of olden Chlangi; exotic fruits of every size and shape and colour; oysters, shrimps, lobsters and crabs; cocktails of flowers served with the black honey of ocean-girt Ardlanthys—the sort of banquet a man might order prepared for his guests on the day of his wedding . . .

. . . Aye, and in certain parts, the night of his funeral!

And feeling hungry, Tharquest tasted of the foods and sipped of the wines, finding all delightful to the palate and very satisfying. Then, uplifted physically and relaxed mentally, he set to and bound him up some torches from turbans in the piles at the feet of the beds in the various rooms. These he dipped in tureens of scented oil at the banquet table, and for torch handles he used wooden legs broken from chairs in that same room. Night was coming on apace now, and the Klühnite, without having noticed how weary he had gradually grown since sipping of the various wines, suddenly found himself tired.

III

SOON THE SUN sank down into the realm of Cthon and Tharquest, for the nonce, gave up his torchlit searching and wandering through the castle's rooms. He found himself a high room with only one door and one slitlike window. The door he braced against opening with a rough wedge of wood at its bottom before lying back on his bed of cushions and silks, his simple sword within easy reach of his right hand. Thus, in the flickering light of a scented turban-torch, the adventurer eventually closed his heavy eyes in reluctant sleep.

And a strange dream came to him, wherein Tharquest wandered amidst green forests and swam in blue and sparkling pools of winelike water. A nymph there was, too—of silken tresses, with eyes deeper than the unplumbed Pool of Xthyll, slim and with flesh of living marble—who led him to her orchid bower and held out her arms to him . . .

Dying, the torch sputtered and gave off oily fumes as the dreamer turned in his bed and reached out avid, hungry hands over the ruffled silks—

—Tharquest coughed as the fumes reached him, coughed and choked and his mind began to rise up from abysses of sleep. Desperately he stretched out his arms and his body to the fading, wavering numph within her evaporating bower—*and contacted horror!*

Horned and warty skin, rough as

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bark to his touch! Protruding nodules and suppurating sores! Breasts flabby, slimy and writhing! Hands with nails like the claws of great crabs, and panting breath in his face smelling worse than the effluvia of the Burial Catacombs of Hroon! This, then, was the lamia Orbiquita!

Tharquest leapt shrieking awake, simple sword in trembling right hand, his left hand thrusting out a fresh torch to catch the embers of its dying brother. Flaring light—and a *Thing* that grew bat-wings even as he gazed in morbid fascination, launching itself from his bed to the window, pausing there for a moment in the slitlike opening to glare lustfully at him, then sliding off into the night with a hideous cackle and rustle of leathern membranes!

For an hour then Tharquest busied himself, hanging drapes of cloaks and capes at the window and strengthening the fortification of the door by forcing a second wedge in at its top. Eventually, satisfied that he had done all he could to ward off any further attempts at his seduction and destruction by the lamia, the Klühnite sat back upon his bed and surveyed the results of his work in the flickering torchlight. Now that the job was done, he gave thought to what had passed and how close he had been to unutterable horror.

But eventually Tharquest's trembling limbs and quaking soul calmed, until, as his heart slowed its wild beating and his eyes began to ache with the strain of glaring about the room at the leaping shadows, the drugged wine of the lamia again brought down the ramparts of his awareness. The lids of his eyes slowly lowered, his terror-taught muscles slackened and his breathing slowed, his head fell to his chest and his body toppled gently over backward until he lay flat on the bed with his simple sword close beside him.

Some time passed while Tharquest sank deeper into sleep, and the second coming of the lamia Orbiquita went completely unbeknown to the slumbering Klühnite. She came as a twist of smoke, issuing in at the crack of the door, forming . . . forming . . .

Again in his dream the wanderer chased his laughing nymph through exotic forests ribboned with sparkling winestreams and pools, and again she led him to her bower of orchids, reaching out to him and pouting prettily and moving her body most seductively.

Tossing and turning in his bed, moaning in his sleep and whispering words of love remembered of many an adventure of old, Tharquest reached out his hands and found the beautiful body of the nymph. And at this the lamia rejoiced greatly, for she had altered her form (an art at which she was greatly adept) to that of a young girl, that she might better fool the handsome young wanderer. Violently he pulled her toward him—and in so doing caused his sword to fall with a clatter from the bed to the floor.

Tharquest heard the sword fall—aye, even through his dreaming flesh-lust he heard it—and his sleeping mind was distracted from its course. Too, in the semi-awareness of his disturbed dream, he now discovered peculiarities: that the flesh his hands had found was cold as the spaces between the stars, and that the breath issuing into his face carried the same carrion stench he had known before! And abruptly he remembered where he was and what he was about.

Again the Klühnite came awake,

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leaping from his suddenly crawling bed. In mid-leap he plucked up his fallen sword in barely articulate hand, snatching at the low-burning torch on the wall. There upon the bed as he held the torch out at trembling arm's length, the perfect form of the nymph of his dreams! One shakey yet resolute step took him to the bedside, but even as he gritted his teeth to thrust his sword into the girl's side her body turned to smoke, streaming swiftly out under the door and leaving only the echo of an awful chuckle behind—that and the memory of a horror that had seemed to rot even as its substance became smoke!

More weary than ever but determined now to fortify the room as fully as possible, Tharquest lit a third torch, then stumbled about stuffing linings torn from capes and jackets into the cracks of the door and blocking the window slit completely with other articles of clothing. By the time he had finished the drug in his blood had reached its peak of potency and it was as much as he could do to keep his eyes open. The room swam and seemed to blur before as he mazedly sought his bed of silks and cushions . . .

As the adventurer fell once more asleep, the lamia Orbiquita was already on her way back to her castle. She had flown into the Desert of Sheb to certain caves she knew—caves that went down to the very pits at Earth's core, where red imps leap from one lava pool to the next—and there she had warmed her chill and loathly flesh by Hell's own fires that the imitation of life thus imbibed might better fool the man come to seek her treasures.

Still hot from Hell she burned when she flapped down atop her pile. Aye, even so hot as to leave cloven prints burning in the stones of those ramparts, but much of her heat was lost as she formed herself into a pool of water to seep into the cracks of the stone and down, down toward Tharquest's room.

Again he was oblivious of her coming, slumbering on as tiny droplets of lamia-formed moisture gathered on the ceiling and ran down the walls.

. . . Yet even sleeping and dreaming the Klühnite was now cautious. Without truly remembering the reasons for his reticence, nevertheless he followed his laughing nymph carefully. Such caution could not last, however, for was he not Tharquest the Rake, known in seventeen cities for his audacity and impudicity and banned forever from fourteen of them through those same improprieties? When the nymph held out her arms to him he went to her, whispering false words of love to a yet more faithless lover, courting her as the tiny male courts the bloated black widow spider, reaching out his hands for her. . . .

Fortunately for Tharquest, the drug was now past its greatest strength and fast waning in potency, and the warnings of past, sleep-fogged encounters with his nymph lingered yet in the eye of his inner memory. Her flesh was warm, true, and her body smooth and having none of rough lumps or pustules—but as he moved his body toward hers and made to kiss her lips . . .

That horrendous smell!

In the nick of time, with no instant to spare, again the adventurer leapt from the arms of that poisonous princess of passion, leapt from her to catch up his sword and smite again and again at the bed . . . which was suddenly wet with liquid so that his blade came away dripping. And the

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droplets from his sword mixed with the moisture soaked through the now empty bed to the stone floor beneath, and entire living pool swiftly flowed away down a narrow crack in the stonework and was gone. Again an eerie chuckle floated back to the shuddering Klühnite.

Very frightened but clearer in his mind now that the drug was dead and absorbed into his system, Tharquest saw that while the torch in the wall burned so low as to give very little light, yet there was a secondary light in the room. Its source was the windowslit where his raiment barricade had started to settle and slip. He tore the piled garments away, and there in the east a golden glowing haze already showed on the horizon. The sun was not yet up, but it would not be long.

Only thinking to be out of the place, Tharquest ripped away the silken wadding and wooden wedges from the door. He passed with a shaky laugh out into the castle's corridors, showing a flash of his former impudence as he sought himself the most magnificent cloak and boots he could find in exchange for his own tatters. Down the stone steps he went, simple sword secure in its scabbard, and as he reached the great outer door—then came his reward!

IV

EVEN AS HE made to leave the pile, a stone flag in the wall near the door pivoted outward revealing an inner cavity, and out from this hole cascaded the most fantastic treasure the wanderer could ever have dreamed of.

Tourmaline, turquoise and topaz; onyx, opal and pearl; garnet, jade and emerald; rose quartz, zircon and lapis lazuli; ruby, sapphire and bloodstone; diamond, aquamarine and amethyst—jewels and precious stones of every sort and size! And gold! And silver! Coins of every realm on Earth, and some—Tharquest fancied, because of their shapes and the images graven upon them—from yet more distant places. Strings of black pearls big as marbles; crowns and tiaras and diadems of alien design; jeweled daggers and golden effigies of strange gods—an endless stream of untold wealth, all flowing out upon the floor!

And so Tharquest knew he had won, and it was a matter of only a few seconds to fill his pockets with some of the choicest pieces, a continent's ransom. Thus, well weighed down with fantastic jewels and priceless bric-à-brac, the wanderer passed from the castle of Orbiquita, and as the golden glow grew yet brighter beyond the far horizon he made his way quickly to his tethered mare. Freeing the animal's rope rein, he was about to mount when he heard his name called. Glancing about, he soon saw the shepherd girl approaching in a hooded cloak through the silent trees.

"Tharquest!" she gasped, peering fearfully about. "Oh, Tharquest, I feared you would be lost—that the lamia would devour you—and so I had to come here to know for certain. I thought never to see you again!"

He smiled his audacious smile and bowed low, doffing his hat and flicking his luxurious cloak. "The lamia is defeated," he cried, "and was there ever any doubt but that this was the way it must be? Did you truly believe that I might fail? and riches—" He dipped into a pocket and tossed the girl a glowing green gem even as green as her eyes and of a like size. "Why!—what could that bauble alone not buy?"

"Oh, Tharquest, Tharquest!" She

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clapped her hands in delight and glowed with pleasure, holding her prize up to the far dim light beyond the trees and peering into its green-fire depths. Then, as she bowed low in acceptance of his gift, the Klühnite glimpsed once more those soft delights first viewed in her father's cot, and he remembered her parting words of the previous afternoon.

Aye, and she must have recognized that look in his eyes, for she laughed and twirled about, her hands to the fastenings of her cloak. And lo!—when next she faced him that cloak lay at her feet and she stood naked and coyly blushing there in the silent glade.

Yet ready as he ever was, the wanderer had learned things that night, and as he leaned forward as if to kiss her his hand secretly fondled the hilt of his simple sword. But no, her breath was sweet as honey, her lips warm with life, her flesh smooth and delightful to the wanderer's touch. So Tharquest quickly threw off his robes and they fell together to the green grass in the glade of stirless trees—

—And the sun not yet up above the horizon!

And her breath (sweetened by an elixer of Djinni brewed deep in the Desert of Sheb) was sugar as her lips fastened upon him. And her flesh (again warmed by Hell's own fires while red imps skipped across the lava pools) quivered warmly under him. And her body (shaped by that art of which she was an adept) opened up beneath him and sucked him in, skin and blood and bone and all, fuel for her fires of lust and horror. And Tharquest gave but a single shriek as he went, hearing in his passing the shrill screaming of his suddenly terrified mare . . .

Later, glutted the nonce and needful of rest, the lamia Orbiquita flapped odd on leathern wings in the direction of her shepherd's cot, there to sleep the morning and lie in waiting for the next adventurer to happen that way.

And later still there was tumult in the camps of the starvelings with Chlangi's walls—tumult and the preparation of cooking pots and pans—as a black mare, lathered about her flanks and red-eyed in a fearful and nameless dread, came galloping to her doom.

—BRIAN LUMLEY

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LIN CARTER

Lin Carter continues the story of the early Thongor (begun with "Black Hawk of Valkarth" in our Sept., 1974, issue and continued with "The City in the Jewel," December, 1975) with this adventure on an uncharted island upon which is shed—

BLACK MOONLIGHT

Illustrated by Tony Gleeson

CHAPTER ONE
Uncharted Seas

THE RED SUN sank in a sheet of flame over the dark waters of Yashengzeb Chun the Southern Sea. It blazed fiercely, igniting the western sky, and against the flame the jungle isle of Zosk loomed up: shaggy, black, mysterious.

Since noon the pirate galley *Black Hawk* stood against the wind, lying off the wide lagoon where billows drove snowy foam against a curve of tawny beach. Now a chill wind arose with the coming of night. It rattled the fronded tree-ferns and cycads that stood like a green wall beyond the curve of wet sand; it caught and boomed the scarlet sails of the lean, rakish black galley, and the gusting breeze sent waves slapping against the sharp dragon-prow.

The gusts were dank with wet and chill. On the foredeck of the galley the first mate shivered to the wind's bite, and drew his heavy boat cloak more closely about him. He was a tall, massive Zangabali with heavy, stubbled jaws and a shaven pate. Gold hoops glittered in his ears as he shivered to the keen breeze. It was late in Shamath, the first month of autumn, with a hint of winter on the wind's edge.

A dark shape loomed against the crimson sky; turning, Chelim nodded to his Captain. "No signal yet; the lad's lost," he grunted heavily.

The Captain of the *Black Hawk* said nothing. The dank wind caught and spread his black cloak, like dark wings on the wind. Beneath the cloak he was half-naked, his bronze body thewed like a young gladiator. Black and thick as a *vandar*'s mane, his unshorn hair blew from broad shoulders, framing his stern, impassive face, strong-jawed, clean-shaven, grimly expressionless. Under scowling black brows his strange gold eyes blazed with sullen, lion-like fires. Few city-bred men could meet the glare of those somber, burning eyes; fewer still could stand before him in battle. Despite the chill night-wind, his superb body was clad only in a Lemurian war-harness of belted straps, with a heavy ornate girdle about his lean hips and a scarlet cloth about his loins. He was a barbarian from the wintry Northlands beyond the Mountains of Mommur, and to him the night was sultry.

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To the pirates of Tarakus, to his fellow Captains of the Red Brotherhood, he was Khongrim of the *Black Hawk*. But his name was Thongor.

"Lost, or slain," he growled in a deep voice. "Gorm knows what beasts lair in those jungles. And there may be savages . . . I have heard the Captains tell strange tales of such isles."

"I, too," muttered the mate, and if he shivered a little, mayhap it was the cold edge of the wind. But these were uncharted seas, and yonder isle was marked on no chart. Few ever dared sail this deep into the unknown west: the fat merchants of Thurdis or Tsargol clung to the coasts of Kovia or Ptartha, and the corsairs preyed only where there were rich cities to loot and plunder.

But Thongor of the *Black Hawk* would venture down the red throat of hell itself for such a treasure as the jungle isle of Zosk held hidden, if old, whispered legends be true. Somewhere in the dark mass of trackless jungle lay a fortune in pearls, a treasure-trove of the rare flame pearls of Cadorna, worth a kingdom's price in the thieves' bazaar at Tarakus. And the Captain of the *Black Hawk* meant to claim that treasure at sword's point, if needs be. Since noon the corsair craft had scouted the jungle isle, finding this lagoon, and sending ashore a volunteer to scout for hostile savages. Reckless young Kanthar Kan had won the toss of the dice. Hours since they should have glimpsed his signal, as arranged. What unexpected doom had befallen the gay, laughing young swordsman? They could wait on him no longer.

Thongor tossed back his mane impatiently.

"Chelim, take us in and let go the anchor. Trice up all sail. Fulvio!"

"Aye, Cap'n?" A scrawny, wizened

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little rogue detached himself from the wheel and snapped to alertness.

"Pick a landing party, and see them well-armed. Lower the longboat when ready. We're going in."

CHAPTER TWO
Death by Fear

A QUARTER-HOUR LATER the longboat was swung over the side on squealing winches. Fulvio's landing party swarmed down the lines to take places in the thwarts—a motley crew of ruffians they looked, ragtail scrapings of the gutters of half the cities of the West. There was a fat, moon-faced Kovian with cold eyes and a placid smile, and a notched cutlass in his sash; swarthy-hued, black-thatched Turanians, a villainous and foul-mouthed lot, with gaudy kerchiefs knotted about their brows and gems flashing on dirty fingers; even a few tawny-skinned, almond-eyed men of Cadorna, who cursed their mates in sing-song, soft voices, fingering dagger-hilts. Some were marked with slave-brands and some bore the sign of outlawry; all were scarred with sword-cuts from many battles on land and sea. A villainous lot, but loyal to the death, and gallant fighting men who would follow wherever Thongor led, and serve him to the last drop of red blood.

The longboat pulled away from the lean black hull of the galley and glided in on silent oars. They ran the boat up on the wet beach and sprang out, seaboots crunching in slick sand, dragging the hull further up the strand where the waves could not reach. It was nearly dark as they entered the dense wall of foliage; the moon had not yet risen, and the dying coals of sunset glimmered on their naked cutlasses and flashed in their eyes as they glanced about uneasily.

The jungle was thick and black and still. *Too* still! The jungle aisles should have rung to the roar of hunting *vandars*, the screech of river-*poa*. But all was silent as death.

Thongor sensed the wrongness in the heavy air from the first. His pirates were city-bred men, their senses dulled from the stench and clamor of the black-alleys that had spawned them. But he had the keen, sharp-honed senses of the wilderness-born—the cruel wastes of the frozen North had cradled him, and his was the hair-trigger sensitivity of the true savage. To have survived in the bitter land of his native Valkarth, he had learned to taste the breeze like a hunting cat, to listen to every whisper, to read the night like a stalking beast.

Once they had wormed through the dense wall of trees, the chill wind died. Blackness lay about them, heavy with the stench of rotting leaves, sour mud, thick with the heady perfume of jungle flowers. And there was something else on the air, as well.

There was the smell of death . . .

His strange gold eyes searching the gloom to every side, his great Valkarthan broadsword naked in his hand, Thongor took the lead, prowling through the black jungle as silent as a cat. A quarter of an hour later they found the body.

It was Fulvio who came upon it first. The scrawny, one-eyed little rogued almost stumbled across it in the impenetrable gloom. His squawk of alarm brought Thongor shouldering through the heavy bushes. The body lay sprawled half under a towering *jannibar* tree. They dragged it into the open and the bosun, a grizzled old Thurdan named Thad Novis, unhooded the lantern he carried, light-

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ing the man's face with the dim beam of candle-flame.

It was Kanthar Kan!

"God's, Cap'n, I nigh stepped on him in the dark, and me blind as a *xuth!*" Fulvio whined, shivering. The other men crowded around, muttering. One stifled a cry of surprise as the lantern lit the face of the young swordsman.

Thongor said nothing, but his jaws set grimly. There was no mark on the swordsman's body, no cut or wound to be found. But he was stone-dead; and the expression stamped on his face was horrible to view—hideous beyond thought.

His eyes started half out of his skull, frozen in a goggle-eyed stare of incredulous horror. His lips were peeled back from his teeth in a ghastly grin. His features were distorted in a grimace of utter horror that sent a chill up the spine to look upon.

Thad Novis ran his hands gently over the cooling corpse, finding nothing. He raised grim eyes to the questioning gaze of his Captain.

" 'Tis devilish weird," he said in a low voice. "Like the lad died of sheer fright. Not a mark on him, anywhere."

The men muttered at that, casting uneasy glances at the black jungle that crowded silently to every side. Some fingered protective amulets or small images of carved stone that dangled about their necks on chains or leathern thongs.

Thongor took up the lantern and went to search the ground where Kanthar was found. The lantern-beam disclosed something even more mysterious than a man who died from fear alone. Kanthar Kan had drawn three words in the bare earth with his fingers before death had claimed him—and they had another mystery to solve.

"*Beware . . . Black Moonlight,*" He read in a grim voice.

"Cap'n, let's go back to the ship an' wait for day," Fulvio whined. "Gods know what that means, but I don't like the sound of it!"

"Nor I," admitted Thongor. "But we go forward, nonetheless."

They shouldered further into the black jungle, leaving the corpse behind. There would be time enough later to lay their dead comrade to rest, if they lived. Gallant, gay young Kanthar Kan would laugh no more; and the mysterious doom that had struck him down in the black jungles of the isle of Zosk lay somewhere ahead of them, brooding in the silence of the night.

CHAPTER THREE

The Warning on the Monolith

THE MOON HAD RISEN over the edge of the world, the great golden Moon of old Lemuria, flooding the jungle with its silken light. It was easier, now, cutting through the dense foliage with cutlass and scimitar and blunt-tipped Chushan *kunwars*. But they were growing weary by this time, tired of fetid reek of rotting vegetation, the bite of insects. Tangled vines caught their feet, tripping them; they slipped in slick mud, cursing, grumbling at thorn-edged leaves that raked bare arms and drew blood.

By moonrise they had come as far as they could go. Here the jungle fell away in a stinking marsh of black mud and rotting stumps; snakes thick as a man's thigh slithered fluidly over fallen tree trunks, and the track of monstrous *poa* were visible on the mudbanks.

Thongor gave the signal for a rest-halt. The men sprawled wearily about, wiping sweaty brows with dirty

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rags, gulping lukewarm wine from skin bottles, glad of a chance to rest aching legs. But the Valkarthan needed no respite: his iron thews seemed invulnerable to fatigue and he could go forward far more swiftly alone. Leaving scrawny little Fulvio in charge, he moved out to the east, skirting the swamp, searching the thick brush with every sense at the alert.

He found the thing by moonlight. A great shaft of grey, lichen-covered stone, thrusting out of the wet earth at a steep angle. The roots of a giant *lotifer* tree had netted the stone pillar, tilting it awry. The clear gold moonlight lit the mold-encrusted monolith sharply.

Thongor paused. Then men *did* inhabit this strange isle of death and nameless, shadowy horror—or had once dwelt here; for the inscription on the stone was in an antique mode of glyphic writing. With the blade of his dagger, he scraped away the crust of lichens, laying bare the deep-cavern hieroglyphs. The language of the inscription was known to him from his travels, for once, years before in a ruined, deserted city in the desert country of the north, he had seen such glyphs. The young Valkarthan was unschooled, but his adventurous career had carried him into strange corners of the Lemurian continent, and he had acquired shards of odd and curious knowledge along the way.

The inscription sent a chill up his spine as he read it by moonlight.

The stone god walks when the Black Moon shines.

His hackles stirred; a tingle of preternatural uneasiness prickled at the nape of his neck, as if he sensed the touch of unseen eyes on his back. He half turned, the steel blade of his great sword, Sarkozan, flashing in his hand; then, with a wry grin twisting his lips, he restrained himself. No puling boy, he, to start and pale at a few words cut on a stone pillar! It took more than an ancient warning to strike fear into the heart of Thongor of the *Black Hawk*—Khongrim of the Red Brotherhood, the terror of the Southern Sea!

He went forward again, but this time with greater care than before, and keeping well to the shadows. Some hand long ages dead had cut that warning of the Black Moon on the mould-crusted monolith; but something very alive had struck down gay, reckless Kanthar Kan. And he, too, had warned of the mysterious peril with his last strength, digging numb fingers in the wet earth to warn his shipmates when they came on his track . . .

Thongor glided through the underbrush like a stalking *vandar*.

What was the curse that haunted this weird isle of treasure and nameless terror?

He would learn the answer sooner than even he could dream!

CHAPTER FOUR
The City of Death

THE COLD WASTES of the Northlands had spawned him, but since he had come down across the Mountains of Mommur five years before, the jungle-girt cities of Kovia and Chush and Ptartha had been his home. So the Valkarthan was no stranger to the tropic wilderness wherethrough he moved silently and swiftly, yet with great care. A mere youth, he had joined a pack of bandits in wild Chush, rising to chieftain the band ere long. He and his legion of cutthroats had been the bane of the fat-bellied merchants of Shembis, whose

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jungle caravans they had raided time and again, until the vengeful prince of that city, Arzang Pome, had hunted them down.

Then he and the survivors of his band had been sold on the block like animals. Arzang Pome had chained the Valkarthan and his bandits to the oars of the slave-galleys of Shembis, and long did they toil under the singing whips in the blazing sun while the hated Dolphin banner floated lazily overhead and the perfumed merchant-captain who was their master sipped cold wine and fondled his wench under striped awnings while they broke their backs at the oars. Then one hot night they rose with naked hands and broken oars to slay and slay in red, roaring rage—stealing the very galley on which they had slaved—and off to the high seas, to join the fierce corsairs of Tarakus the Pirate City, and to learn a new trade. But piracy was close akin to banditry, and thus Thongor and his comrades had risen in the past two years to a high rank amid the corsair fleet. It was the dying whisper of an old veteran sailor they had rescued from execution in Cadorna that had put them on the track of the fabulous treasure of the isle of Zosk, deep in the uncharted wastes of the sea. Somewhere in those black jungles a fortune in flame pearls lay hid—"in the place of the great stones," the old sailor had said.

And then he came upon it, stark and cold and dead in the flood of the golden Moon.

The young Barbarian came to a sudden halt there at the edge of the jungle. He stared ahead, his blood racing with the thrill of discovery. Was *this* the 'place of the great stones' whereof the dying sailor had spoken?

A few yards from where he crouched in the thick brush, the jungle dwindled away to a rocky plain. The ground fell away beyond, in an immense, circular valley like a vast bowl cut in the rock. Tumbled stone slabs lay about; broken spires of rock loomed and tilted, for all the world like the shattered pillars of some dead, ruined city of time's dawn. Here and there, tremendous blocks of stone lay tumbled, as if scattered about by the careless hands of playful giants.

Thongor searched the wilderness of broken, scattered stone with thoughtful eyes. Surely, this must be the place the old sailor had whispered of. But was it a thing of nature, or the work of men? The monolith he had come upon in the jungle had been cut and set by human hands . . . and the regularity of these stones were haunted by an uncanny suggestion of human purpose and workmanship.

He went down into the valley and prowled the silent avenues of somber desolation. No sign of life alerted his keen senses. If men had ever dwelt here, they were long vanished. No smoke of cooking fires ascended the moonlit sky, no footstep echoed down the empty avenues of tumbled stone, no human rubbish caught his searching gaze, not a shard of broken pottery, a discarded rag, or the ashes of a dead fire. It was like a city of death, this waste of broken rock: like the gaunt bones of a dead metropolis, eerie and silent and empty in the wash of moonlight; and if aught wandered here it was ghosts of the long-dead past.

Amidst the trackless ruin, he came upon the pool whereof the old sailor had spoken. A motionless disc of dark waters, impenetrable to the eye, ringed about with a lip of stone. This

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surely was the work of men, for the pool formed a perfect circle and the stone marge was cut and dressed and smoothed by skill and not by nature.

Amidst the pool, a stone pillar rose against a tropic sky filled with blazing stars. It was like the monolith he had found in the jungle, and yet different, too. For thirty feet the stone pillar loomed up in the moonlight, tall and straight as an obelisk, but rough-hewn and jagged, and it bore no glyphs that he could see. All about the motionless pool stretched a plaza of tumbled, uneven stone slabs. Thongor crossed the plaza with silent tread and knelt by the edge of the pool, dipping one hand within.

The water was cold and foul, bescummed and stagnant, but his hand came up filled with dripping pearls. Slick and moony were they, with a sullen glow of fire in their sheen and rondure. Flame pearls of Cadorna—he knew them at a glance—of superb and perfect water and extraordinary size!

He held a satrap's ransom in his hand. And the wealth of a dozen emperors slept still beneath the dark waters. A smile lit his somber features. The buccaneer scooped up handful after handful of flame pearls from the black pool, admiring their glistening fire in the cold moonlight. Entranced, he stared down at the wet pearls in his hand. They glowed like little moons.

Then a deep-chested snarl reached his ear—the scrape of calloused bare feet on dry stone. He sprang to his feet, thrusting the dripping handful of pearls in the top of his swash seaboots, and turned.

And then the savages were upon him, a herd of snarling naked beast-men, broken tusks bared and blood-lust burning in their slitted eyes. The very earth spewed them up: from dark lairs under the tilted slabs of the plaza they came. Troglodytes—cave-dwellers! He knew then why he had found no token of human habitation in all these acres of immemorial desolation.

And they were upon him, heavy bodies hurled at his back, hard paws clutching his arms, fangs snapping at his very throat.

CHAPTER FIVE
Red Steel!

THE YOUNG BUCCANEER shook the hair-pelted savages from him as the kingly *vandar* of the jungle shakes off a pack of dogs. He drove his booted heel deep in the belly of one snarling foe: the beast-thing grunted, folded, and fell.

Then the great broadsword, Sarkozan, was free of its scabbard and singing its cold and eerie song of death as it cut the wind. There were old runes acid-etched down the length of the long, deep blade, and the great gem set in the pommel blazed like an angry eye. The broadsword flashed, a brilliant steel mirror in the Moon, as Thongor whipped it high over his head and brought it whistling down to bite through brain and bone and meat. The clean steel glittered once and when he drew it back it was washed with red.

For a time he held them, sweeping the great sword in a tireless arc. They feared the cold flash of the edged steel as a witch fears silver. He held them at bay, but they came at him in twos and threes, bounding like jackals, fangs snapping hungrily for his flesh. The Valkarthan at first thought them savages, then beasts, finally men. They went naked like brutes, but walked upright like men. They had hulking, anthropoid bodies, slop-

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ing ape-like shoulders, and long arms, knotted with bulging sinews, that hung dangling to their knees. Their heads were bullet-like, sunken deep in massive shoulders, hidden in a tangle of filthy, matted hair through which slitted eyes gleamed redly with mad fires.

But their thick torsos and bowed legs bore but a sparse pelt. The hide that showed bare between patches of stringy fur was the hue of dirty amber and their blazing eyes were aslant, as far as he could judge. The young buccaneer knew but one nation in all Lemuria with tawny amber skin and slanted eyes—the men of ancient Cadorna, westernmost of all the cities of Lemuria. Could these snarling, shambling, loping beast-things be the degenerate remnants of a lost Cadornyana colony, forgotten for ages?

Perhaps. But he had no time to puzzle it out now. He was too busy merely staying alive. They came at him like mad dogs and he cut them down with singing red steel till they heaped the stone margin of the pool with their gore-splashed bodies. Eight, ten, a dozen he slaughtered, but it was only a matter of time until they swarmed over him, battered him down, dragged him to earth under the sheer weight of their numbers.

Now he wished he had not come down alone into the great bowl-like valley, but had gone back to camp as he should have. O, to have a stout dozen of his brawling buccaneers at his back, with dirk and cutlas and scimitar! But it was too late for recriminations now. He fought on, but now even his iron thews ached with weariness and the breath rasped in his dry throat. He blinked against the red mist that thickened before his gaze.

Then one of the loping beast-things, perhaps less sunk in the red murk of savagery than its fellows, closer to the light of reason and manhood, saw in its cunning that it could not reach the hated man-thing through the wall of red and singing steel. So it squatted on the broken pave, plucked up a heavy shard of rock in one hairy paw, and flung it at Thongor with all the coiled strength of that ape-like arm.

It caught the Valkarthan on the brow—a stunning blow. He lurched, staggered, fighting for consciousness, and the red sword sagged in suddenly nerveless fingers and fell, ringing against the stone pavement of the plaza like a stricken gong.

They had had him at last. A thick-set body slammed into him, chest and belly, and drove him from his feet. In a flash the burly beast-thing was worrying at his throat. Thongor jammed one forearm under the creature's jaw and held the snapping fang away from his jugular. Fetid, stinking hot breath blew in his face. The naked, furry body was rank in his nostrils. Thick-fingered paws closed about his throat, throttling him. He grunted as another heavy body slammed on top of him, and another, until he was buried under a pack of snarling, clawing beast-things.

His mind dimmed as he fought for breath. A haze thickened before his eyes; his lung was afire; his heart labored within his breast. He fought for air and fought with ebbing strength to hold those snapping tusks away from his throat.

Then a sharp, imperious voice called out from somewhere beyond the heap of beast-things. Thongor could not make out the words, for they were in a tongue unknown to him. But the crushing weight that pressed him against the broken stone

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slabs lessened and the iron grip loosened from about his neck. He gulped air into starved lungs as strong hands dragged him to his feet and bound his wrists behind his back with tight leathern thongs that bit into numb flesh. Many men would have despaired then, taken captive by the shambling horde that infested the ancient ruins.

It was not the way of Thongor to despair, but he stared into a grim future, knowing that his life could now be counted in hours; perhaps, in minutes.

CHAPTER SIX
Night Fears

It was the grizzled old Thurdan warrior, Thad Novis, who was the first to become uneasy over Thongor's prolonged absence. The old warrior had been a stalwart of Jorn's Raiders when the boy Thongor had first joined the pack of bandits he would later chieftain. From the first, the older warrior had felt a paternal stirring in his breast as he saw the grim courage and iron strength and utter fearlessness the Barbarian boy displayed. Thad Novis had followed his young leader from banditry into slavery, and from thence to a life of lawlessness and adventure on the high seas. His dogged loyalty had never wavered; now he prowled the perimeter of the camp, baffled and obscurely worried, peering into the moon-washed jungle with searching eyes.

At length he sought out scrawny little Fulvio, who sprawled lazily against a log, nursing a fat wine-skin.

"Hell's blood, man, what ails you?" Fulvio whined. "The chief can take care o' himself better nor any of us. Wait here, said he, and wait here we does. He'll come back, in his good time. Sit—rest—take some wine!"

The older man shook his head determinedly.

" 'Tis not like the lad to be gone so long," he growled. "He meant to scout a path around this swamp, not explore the stinking isle himself. Somewhat has taken him, I know . . . mayhap the same Thing that took poor Kanthar Kan . . ."

The words hung there in the air. Fulvio licked thin lips with a pointed tongue, and shivered as to a sudden gust of cold. Deep in his heart, the wizened little one-eyed rogue knew the stolid, loyal Thurdan spoke the truth. But the whining little Fulvio was reluctant to stir from this place of safety to plunge into the unknown and silent depths of the waiting jungle.

Fear and loyalty wrestled within Fulvio's scrawny breast. Self-love and the greed for gold were the only passions the little gutter-rat had ever known. But he, too, worshipped Thongor and went in awe of the mighty Barbarian. Thongor was what he could perhaps have been, had he been nourished in the wintry wild among strong stalwart men and noble-hearted, courageous women, but Fate had given him a sniveling beggar for a father and a sluttish shrew for a mother, and the stinking back-alleys of the slums of Pelorm for his home.

Fulvio was cowardly at heart, and vicious as only the cowardly can be. But in his heart, where fear wrestled with loyalty, he idolized the strong young buccaneer Captain. And, for once, loyalty won out against a lifetime of twisted selfishness.

Spitting vile curses, little Fulvio scrambled to his feet and snarled at the sprawled men of the landing-party.

"On your feet, you yellow-gutted whelps! We be movin' out, Gods help us. The Cap'n should of been back by now; somewhat may have happened to 'im." He fixed the stolid old Thurdan with a venomous eye. "Gorm help ye, grizzled old dog, if the Cap'n be not in need of us!"

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Thad Novis said nothing. Incapable of feeling the cold sick gnaw of fear himself, he never knew what spark of true heroism he had stirred to fire in Fulvio's breast.

They fanned out when they hit the jungle, keeping well in earshot of each other. Blackness closed about little Fulvio like a clammy hand. Sweating and cursing foully under his breath, the little rogue limped along, lashing out at tangling vines and thorny branches with his cutlass as he went. It was one thing to follow such a man as Thongor into the black yawning maw of unknown peril; it was quite another thing to do it on your own volition.

The jungle thickened about them, entangled boughs shutting out the rich floods of moonlight. Clumping along through wet darkness, Fulvio thought of the slithering, befanged things that mayhap lurked all about him in the night. He envisioned the landslide-rush of the *deodath*, the dreaded dragon-cat of the jungle countries. Cold dew dripped down his scrawny neck—or was it the numbing kiss of the *fathla*, the ghastly blood-sucking tree-leeches of Chush and Kovia? A heavy vine swung overhead—or was it the horrible, mancrushing coils of the *oph*, the horned serpent of the tropic depths?

Night-fears preyed upon him, nibbling away at the edges of his courage, sapping his resolution. But the little one-eyed rogue limped forward without pause, cursing himself for a foolhardy, reckless madman every long step of the way.

They came to the stony monolith Thongor had discovered earlier, and paused, eyeing its enigmatic glyphs with shuddering apprehension. Dread shapes of night and terror were known to haunt old ruined cities—ghouls and *morgulacs*, as Lemurian legend named vampires, and prowling ghosts of the dead that could not rest.

Thad Novis hefted his heavy scimitar restlessly.

"Which way?" he asked.

Fulvio gnawed his under-lip, glancing dubiously about. Here the jungle aisle parted, one lane wandering deep into the jungle's black heart, the other striking away due east. It was in that direction Thongor had headed an hour before: but Fulvio could not know that.

"Which way, Fulvio?" puffed a fat, moon-faced Kovian named Qualb. The others crowded near.

Fulvio said nothing, chewing his lip in a torment of indecision. Which way? One path led to Thongor, who might even now be face to face with death; the other route led far from his peril, and if they followed it they would become lost in the black jungles of Zosk.

Which way?

CHAPTER SEVEN
The Black Moon

THE BEAST-MEN staked Thongor out to die. They drove four pegs into the earth between the riven slabs of the plaza and bound his wrists and ankles to them with tough thongs. Spread-eagled, his sinews stretched to the limit of endurance, even the Valkarthan's steely strength could not free him of his bonds.

Jaws set grimly, Thongor waited for death.

The leader of the horde of shambling degenerates paid his captive no attention. With the rapt, blind gaze of a fanatic or a madman he stared without blinking up into the cold fire of the golden Moon. He was unlike the loping horde of grunting savages he ruled: tall, slim, gaunt to the point of imaciation, his lean frame wrapped in tattered, filthy rags of what had once been the gorgeous ceremonial robes of an ancient priest.

He stood atop a block of stone, staring beyond the black pool and the

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rough-hewn pylon of rock to the soaring moon. His hair was a tangle of matted witch-locks as it fell about the starved skull of his face. His eyes burned through the tangle like sick green fires. He was priest-king of the hulking, naked brutes, the last of a time-forgotten line. But he was only slightly more *man* than they. Beneath the gorgeous, filthy tatters his gaunt body was naked and unwashed. His feet were bare and black were filth. His grime-crusted hands, gaunt like terrible claws, clutched a rod of sleek black *nebium*, atop which a smoky crystal pulsed like a dying coal.

Thongor had seen black rods like his before, and he knew them for Rods of Power. He also knew the black, unholy sorcery men wrought with such relics of ancient wisdom, and his lips pressed together until they paled.

With Thongor securely bound, the shambling beast-men withdrew grunting, squatting in a semi-circle behind the priest and the sacrifice. And the ceremony began . . .

Scattered rags of cloud fled before the Moon, scattering its light in wandering shafts of cold fire that flickered eerily here and there over this weird scene of stony desolation. The wizard began talking to the half-hid Moon in guttural, clotted sounds that hardly sounded like human speech. The blood ran cold in Thongor's veins as he heard the strange, coughing sounds. He knew *that* tongue from of old; it was the Chaos Litany. The Dragon Kings of age-lost and legend-drowned Hyperborea had learned it from the black gods of madness who ruled beyond the stars. Human lips were never meant to frame such sounds, and to hear them spoken by a man was blasphemy against humankind.

The alien speech droned on, and suddenly a thrill of superstitious awe ran through Thongor. For the shifting, flickering rays were changing hue. He stared up, scalp prickling with chill premonition. *And the Moon turned to blood.*

Shafts of weird crimson light wandered about the scene of primal desolation. It was uncanny—horrible! The Moon glared down at him like the red, burning eye of some maddened god.

Behind him somewhere, the beast-things groaned and whimpered, grovelling before this awesome display of supernatural power. On the stone block, the wizard stood like a stone, carven image, rapt in unholy ecstacy, as the abominable litany spewed from his writhing lips.

Then Thongor sensed a tension in the air. Nature seemed to holds its breath, awaiting some dark miracle of evil. An aura of force tingled along the nerves of the young buccaneer.

And the sky, which had been velvet-black, flushed with cold, dead white radiance!

As the heavens reversed their coloration, the very stars did so as well. Now, through weirdly-colored ragged clouds the stars burned like black diamonds. The scene was such a mingling of incredible terror and wonder, that it wrung a cry from Thongor's grim lips. "*Gorm!*" he groaned, calling upon the god of his savage homeland. And it was as much a prayer as a curse.

And then the Moon turned black, and even the gods could not help him now . . .

CHAPTER EIGHT
It Walks by Moonlight

FROM A DISC of evil crimson, the Moon's brilliant fires curdled, dark-

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ened, became utter blackness like a pool of ink. Weird, weird, to watch a Black Moon blaze in a sky of dead white flame! In his wildest nightmares, the Barbarian had never dreamed of a spectacle so awesome and unreal.

But the ultimate abomination was yet to come.

For still a ragged drift of torn and tattered cloudlets hung before the orb of ebon fire, scattering its rays. The shafts of dark light floated here and there about the plaza, blackening the crumbled stones which else lay bathed in the strange, sourceless luminescence of the glowing sky.

Now, shaft after shaft of black moonlight flashed across that massive pillar of dark, jagged stone that loomed from amidst the pool. And as the uncanny negation of light blackened the rugged monolith, it began to—*change!*

It softened, slid and clotted like hot candlewax; it was as if the kiss of the black rays awoke the dormant spirit within the stone pillar, which struggled to regain its lost shape. As Thongor watched in unbelieving amazement, the stone flowed like wax, melting and reshaping itself in the dark radiance. The pillar cleft at the base; two shards split from its flanks; a rough sphere melted into being at its crest. The new shape the monolith assumed under the weird influence of the moon-rays bore a loathsome yet haunting familiarity. It was like a botched, obscene caricature of Man—a hideous, twisted, distorted semblance—but a semblance, nonetheless!

The melting stone solidified now. Like a grotesque idol hewn by a glibbering madman, the stone thing stood amidst the dark pool. And lived!

And—*walked!*

One stone limb thrust forward, lurching. At the knee—or where the knee would have been, had the stone thing possessed one—rough stone rubbed against stone with an indescribably horrible *grating* sound. Then, jerkily, the other leg thrust forth dripping from the dark pool. The misshapen paw that was the thing's foot or hoof crunched on the stone pave, which squealed under its many tons of ponderous weight.

Behind the spread-eagled buccaneer, the beast-men moaned and babbled in an ecstacy of fear and gloating anticipation. And globules of cold sweat burst forth on Thongor's brow: he knew now the death decreed for him. *He was to be trampled to red slime beneath the stone paws of the walking god!*

But it was not the way of Thongor to lie supinely, waiting for death. Savage rage surged up within him, crushing out his cold fear. Black fury boiled in his veins. His brows contorted in a spasm of berserk, fighting wrath. Suddenly he split the air with a bellow of inarticulate anger. The roar of a cornered *vandar* burst from his snarling lips. And down his wide-stretched arms great thews swelled in a vain attempt to wrench his arms free. Mighty bands of solid muscle stood forth in knife-edge relief on his magnificent chest. His face blackened with effort as he threw every ounce of iron strength his splendid physique possessed into one colossal surge of power—

And failed!

Though he tore his wrists raw, the leathern thongs held and the deep-driven stakes did not budge. Again and again he threw the coiled strength of back and arm and shoulder in a terrific effort to burst his bonds. His deep-chested roar of challenge made the night hideous: booming echoes bounced from rock to rock.

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But naught sufficed to free him from this death-trap. And step by ponderous, shuffling step the weirdly-animated stone thing advanced upon him. Its blind, ghastly caricature of a face stared stonily down at him now from what seemed a tremendous height. Another instant—another slow, dragging scrape of stone against stone, and it would be upon him.

Then—somewhere behind him, beyong the edges of his vision—*riot!*

The beast-men exploded into squeals of pain. The ring of blades—the patter of many running feet. A spear went whizzing over his prostrate form to clatter off the pitted breast of the now-immobile stone thing. Slowly, hideously, the blind featureless face of jagged rock twisted to as if to stare beyond Thongor to the source of the inexplicable interruption. Due to a trick of light and shade, the mask of stone bore a momentarily quizzical expression.

Then, from behind Thongor, a hand grabbed at his arm and a steel dagger-blade flashed downward toward his flesh!

CHAPTER NINE
Night of Hell

THE FLASHING BLADE slashed through the thongs that bound his wrist. The leather snapped and his arm was free. He looked up, relief flooding his features, to see the plump, anxious face of the moon-faced Kovian, Qualb, as he bent puffing to cut free Thongor's other arm.

"Damn your hide," Thongor growled, "I thought you lazy dogs would never come!"

"Bless me, Cap'n, an' we might not yet be here, lost in this cursed maze of tumbled stone, had it not been for you a-yellin' to wake the dead!" Qualb wheezed, chuckling, as he slashed the thongs that bound his feet. "Once ol' Thad Novis heard that bellowing, he knew 'twas you, and we came straight!"

Thongor staggered to his feet, grunting at the pain of circulation gnawing at his numb flesh. His hands were black and swollen, almost useless, like blunt paws. But the heavy seaboots had protected his legs from the worse punishment, and he could stand.

He turned, taking in the situation with one swift, all-incompassing glance. His stout band of rogues were cutting the shambling savages to ribbons. In another few moments, the beast-herd would break and flee for their subterranean burrows—

A screech of fury!

The gaunt wizard, his uncanny trance broken, stood atop the great rock, glaring down at them with mad eyes of scarlet wrath. One starved, skeletal arm brandished aloft the Rod of Power. From writhing lips burst forth again that hellish litany of black ensorcellment.

And the stone thing moved again!

Slabs squeaked under its shifting weight as it lurched forward, heavy clubbed arms raised threateningly. And directly in its path, Thongor's gallant little band of buccaneers stood holding off the horde of grunting savages. A few more sliding steps and the walking idol would be among them! Feet like bolders would crush and slay, trampling the men down as a man might snuff out the lives of in crawling insects under his heel!

There was no time to shout the warning—no time even to think! Thongor was triggered into a rush of instant action by some instinctive thing quicker and simpler than thought itself—the killing fury of a maddened beast. A growl of challenge burst from his lips, which writhed back from his white teeth in a fighting

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grin. And he exploded into action—

One fantastic, superhuman bound carried him to the crest of the towering rock whereon the warlock stood, arms lifted in imprecation. Thongor was upon the crazed witch-man before anyone even saw it. His hands were still numb and useless, but they were calloused and hard and heavy. With the back of one he clubbed the warlock across the mouth and knocked him to his knees, spitting broken teeth and dribbling blood. With the other numb paw Thongor ripped the crystal-tipped wand from his hand—then kicked him full in the face, hurling him backwards off the rock to thud sprawling and astounded on the pavement below.

Directly in the path of the stone monster!

Dribbling blood and the foam of maniacal rage, the warlock staggered to his feet, eyes burning like hell-moons through tangled locks. Then his fury ebbed—his swarthy features paled milky-white—his eyes goggled in unbelieving horror—*for his own god was about to trample him down underfoot!*

Thongor whirled, poised, and flung the *nebium* wand like a javelin! Straight and true it hurtled against the pitted breast of the walking thing it had roused to a hideous travesty of life. The flashing crystal struck the stone breast first—and exploded in a dazzle of diamond dust.

And the Black Moon died . . .

Swift as waking from a dream, the haunting spell of evil magic faded from the night.

The uncanny, incandescent heavens dimmed—darkened!

The evil moon glowed red—then bright, pure gold again. No more did black stars blaze in an enchanted sky: now the familiar stars of old twinkled down from dark and friendly heavens once again.

There came a creak of stone rasping against stone. The lurching, dragging thing froze into immobility as the evil spell which had for a time flogged it to a ghastly semblance of life perished with the splintering of the crystal. And the stone god became . . . only a thing of stone.

But when the spell that had animated it was broken, it had been off-balance, lurching forward to trample Thongor's embattled pirates. Now, like an avalanche, it came crashing down to smash asunder against the pave. The thunder of tons of stone against stone was deafening. But even above the clangour of the fallen image, as it shattered into a thousand crumbling bits against the floor of the pavement, one sharp, agonizing screech of unbelieving horror pierced the thunder-clap of noise.

It was the gaunt warlock. The wizard-priest of the troglodytes had been directly in the path of his toppling god. Tons of falling rock buried him from sight and his last cry was cut short.

Then the beast-men broke and fled, shambling whimpering for their holes, while Thongor's weary pirates rested panting on their encrimsoned swords and watched them go. Their spirit was broken; but then few men can endure to stand and watch the death of their god. And they were not quite men.

In the ringing silence, Thongor sagged, relaxing, and began to rub feeling back into his hurting hands. He was grey with rock-dust from brow to heel, and devilishly thirsty, but he was alive and whole.

And this night of hell was over!

CHAPTER TEN
High Seas

DAWN BURST FLAMING up over

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the edges of the world and drove away the shadows of the night.

With dawn came a quick, freshening breeze that caught and boomed in the scarlet sails of the lean black galley. Taut rigging thrummed like a great harp in the rising wind. The deck swayed and the prow rose sharply.

Wrapped in a warm cloak, Thongor leaned against the rail, pouring cold red wine down his gullet. When he came up for air, bald, glum-faced Chelim was at his side.

"The burial-party be all aboard now," the Zangabali grunted heavily. "Kanthar Kan sleeps with his fathers now—or drinks the morning cup in the Hall of Heroes, if the priests tell it true."

"Aye," Thongor nodded. "And is that why you've such a long face? He died like a man, writing a warning to his shipmates with his last dregs of strength. There's naught to mourn in a brave man's death. Pray Gorm we all meet our end so gallantly!"

The first mate rubbed bestubbled cheeks, his expression sour.

" 'Tis not that, Cap'n—but this cursed voyage, come to naught! All this way, and lose a good man, and for what? No treasure . . . only black jungles, stinking savages, and sorcery to boot. Mayhap we'll greet a fat merchantman on our way home to Tarakus and lighten his cargo a mite, but I cannot help but wish it had been . . ."

His words trailed off. His eyes widened and a look of blank stupefaction passed over his face, giving him a singularly ludicrous expression. For without a word, face solemn, Thongor had bent and dug one hand deep in his high sea-boots, and brought up a handful of glistening ruddy pearls. And another. And another!

"The brutes surprised me at the pool, just as I was admiring their pretty pearls," the young buccaneer explained. "I just had time to stuff a few handsful in my boots—devilish uncomfortable things to walk on, pearls are. But there should be enough pretties here to warm the heart of the coldest trader in the thieves' bazaar back in Tarakus . . . and enough to split among the crew so that any that want can retire to a life of ease, after this voyage."

The look of astonishment passed from Chelim's face and was replaced by a wondering, beaming grin.

"Hoy, Fulvio, lads, come here!" he boomed. "See what the Cap'n fetched back from that cursed city . . . lad," he said frankly, "my heart goes out to you: with a pack of howling savages just leapin' on your back, you take time enough to shove a prince's ransom down your boots before turning to fight for your life. Now *that's* what I call thinking like a born pirate!"

Dog-tired from the night's perils and exertions, the crew ambled over to the rail to find out why their captain and first mate were whooping with laughter in so odd a manner. Needless to say, once the cause of the hilarity was made clear to them, their hearts lifted at one glimpse of the fabulous flame pearls of Cadorna.

A pirate, like a man who follows any other trade, likes to turn a tidy profit from a day's toil. And not long thereafter, as the lordly Sun ascended the clear blue sky, the pirate galley *Black Hawk* drew up her dripping anchor, turned about into the wind, and pointed her dragon prow to the high seas, and sailed away into a new adventure . . .

But that's *another* story.

—LIN CARTER

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L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers

WHITE WIZARD IN TWEEDS

In 1954, an odd little advertisement appeared in successive issues of the New York *Times*. It showed a small drawing of a snaky flying dragon. The legend said: *The Fellowship of the Ring*. After several of these advertisements had appeared, it was disclosed that *The Fellowship of the Ring* was a new fantasy novel by an Oxford professor named J. R. R. Tolkien (pronounced TOLL-keen).

The book, published on October 21, 1954, was a sizable volume of 423 printed pages, including front matter. It contained about 220,000 words, with a large folded map of Tolkien's imaginary realms in the back. Houghton Mifflin Company of Boston had bound the book from sheets printed in England for George Allen and Unwin of London and shipped unbound to the United States.

Readers learned that this was an adult sequel to Tolkien's *The Hobbit*: a child's fairy tale, published in the United Kingdom in 1937 and in the United States in 1938. *The Hobbit* had enjoyed a gratifying success, having won the New York *Herald Tribune* prize for the best children's book of the year. A literal-minded German publisher to whom the book was submitted, however, rejected it on the ground that his people had searched dictionaries and encyclopedias, and there was positively no such thing as a Hobbit.

Moreover, it was said, *The Fellowship of the Ring* was only the first volume of a trilogy, to be called *The Lord of the Rings*—or, if one prefers, *The Lord of the Rings* was a three-volume novel, of which this was the first volume. The resulting work would come to about two thirds of a million words.

The remaining two volumes, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*, appeared during the next fifteen months. Of the third volume, only three quarters were occupied by the story proper. The rest consisted of appendices, in which Tolkien gave a history and chronology of his fictitious prehistoric milieu of Middle-Earth (something like Howard's "Hyborian Age"), based upon a fictitious *Red Book of Westmarch* (like Howard's *Nemedian Chronicles* and Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*).

The *Red Book of Westmarch* was doubtless suggested by two real collections of medieval Welsh tales, the *Red Book of Hergest* and the *White Book of Rhydderch*. Lady Charlotte Guest translated these stories and in 1838 published them under her own title of Mabinogion, by which the collection has been known ever since. The appendices also give genealogies

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of some of the characters, linguistic notes on Tolkien's invented Elvish and Dwarvish languages (including their complex rules of pronunciation), and tables of the alphabets and calendars of these peoples.

The Lord of the Rings had modest American sales. For several years, the sales of each volume hovered between one and two thousand copies a year. (The British edition did better, selling 35,000 sets from 1954 to 1961.) Nevertheless, the work became the focus of a cult of admirers and incited an extraordinary volume of critical comment and controversy.

Most critics lauded the story. In the *New York Times Book Review*, W. H. Auden said that Tolkien had "succeeded more completely than any previous writer in this genre in using the traditional properties of the Quest, the heroic journey, the Numinous Object." Tolkien's friend and fellow fantasist, C. S. Lewis, compared the work to that of Ariosto and spoke of its "beauties which pierce like swords or burn like cold iron. . . . good beyond hope."

Others compared the book to Spenser and Malory. Colin Wilson, when at last persuaded to read LOTR (as Tolkienians abbreviate the title) spent three days in bed, completely absorbed in Frodo's adventures.

The brilliant but opinionated Edmund Wilson, however, emphatically disagreed. Writing in *The Nation*, Wilson sarcastically titled his review: "Oo, Those Awful Orcs!" After summarizing some of the previous critical opinions, Wilson viewed the book itself as if it had crawled out from under a flat stone; he "apparently felt insulted at having to review it."[1] He said:

The reviewer has just read the whole thing to his seven-year-old daughter, who has been through The Hobbit *countless times. . . . One is puzzled to know why the author should have supposed he was writing for adults . . . . except when he is being pedantic and also boring the adult reader, there is little in* The Lord of the Rings *over the head of a seven-year-old child. It is essentially a children's book—a children's book which has somehow gotten out of hand, since, instead of directing it at the "juvenile" market, the author has indulged himself in developing the fantasy for its own sake. . . .*

Tolkein, Wilson noted, confessed that the work had developed as an outgrowth of his interest in linguistics, to provide a world for the "Elvish" language that he had invented. *An overgrown fairy story, a philological curiosity—that is, then, what* The Lord of the Rings *really is. The pretentiousness is all on the part of Dr. Tolkien's infatuated admirers. . . .*[2]

The three volumes also contained a good deal of poetry, apposite to the story and characters but little of it memorable. Most of it is set in a simple iambic tetrameter, with rhyme schemes aabb or abab, which soon becomes monotonous. In a very few places, Tolkien's imagery rises to the point of giving (at least to me) a touch of true poetic *frisson*:

O Elbereth! Gilthoniel!
We still remember, we who dwell
In this far land beneath the trees,
Thy starlight on the Western Seas.

Or again:

Three Rings for the Elven-kings under the sky,
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in their halls of stone,
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die,
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.
One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,

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One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.[3]

Auden had expressed a poor opinion of Tolkien's poetry, but Wilson chided Auden for not observing that Tolkien's prose was just as bad. "Prose and verse are on a same level of professorial amateurishness."

While Wilson conceded that the concept of a quest to get rid of the evil ring had possibilities, he did not admire Tolkien's use of the theme: "There are dreadful hovering birds—think of it, horrible birds of prey!" "The wars are never dynamic; the ordeals give no sense of strain; the fair ladies would not stir a heartbeat; the horrors would not hurt a fly." "These characters who are no characters are involved in interminable adventures the poverty of invention displayed in which is, it seems to me, almost pathetic." ". . . these bugaboos are not magnetic; they are feeble and rather blank; one does not feel that they have any real power. The Good People simply say 'Boo' to them." Wilson concludes:

Now how is it that these long-winded volumes of what looks to this reviewer like balderdash have elicited such tributes as those above? The answer is, I believe, that certain people have a lifelong appetite for juvenile trash. They would not accept adult trash, but, when confronted with the pre-teen-age article, they revert to the mental phase which delighted in Elsie Dinsmore *and* Little Lord Fauntleroy. . . .*You can see it in the tone they fall into when they talk about Tolkien in print; they bubble, they squeal, they coo; they go on about Malory and Spenser—both of whom have a charm and a distinction that Tolkien has never touched.*

As for me, if we must read about imaginary kingdoms, give me James Branch Cabell's Poictesme. He at least writes for grown-up people, and he does not present the drama of life as a showdown between the Good People and goblins. . . .

One wonders: whence such wildly divergent opinions? What is the source of Wilson's animosity? He damns Tolkien's prose, which I have found, if not so superlative as some Tolkienians assert, at least a good, straightforward, serviceable, literate English (occasionally awkward, occasionally eloquent), which gets its images and ideas across with clarity and concision. This can hardly be said of the widely admired Dreiser and Faulkner. Neither is Tolkien ever incoherent—a quality which some advanced thinkers take as a sign of "sincerity."

For one thing, Wilson, like Lovecraft, was wont to divide all literature into a small group of work that he liked and therefore classed as "real literature," and a much larger class of all the rest, which he dismissed as "hack work" or "trash."

This, however, is a subjective view of literature. The immature mind tends to divide phenomena into a few simple classes, to exaggerate their differences and distinctiveness, and to make sweeping judgments on whole classes. A more mature view realizes the infinite diversity of such phenomena and admits that classes are human artifacts, useful but not to be taken too seriously.

In the case of writing, literature comes in many kinds and genres, addressed to different readerships for different purposes. In any one class, the writing may be done well, badly, or in between. But there is no point in judging a whodunnit, a medical textbook, a child's fairy tale, and a novel exposing conditions in the alarm-clock industry by the same

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standards. The question in each case is: How well has each author succeeded in getting across, to the readers to whom the work is addressed, the particular information, message, or emotion he wants to convey?

To condemn a work because it appeals to children is, in effect, to jettison a great deal of adult fiction. To take *any* fiction seriously entails a degree of make-believe, since the reader knows full well that the events narrated never really happened.

Wilson was hypercritical of most fantasy. He dismissed Lovecraft's fiction as "hack work" and found fault with Lovecraft for admiring the stories of Dunsany and Machen. It would seem that Cabell was about the only fantasy writer whom Wilson admired. Cabell was in many ways the opposite of Tolkien: a genial cynic as against Tolkien's moral earnestness; a world-weary sophisticate as against Tolkien's love of wholesome simplicity. And few dispute the exquisite perfection of Cabell's prose.

One of the many books on Tolkien makes an *ad hominem* judgment on Wilson, which may be not unfair: "Tolkien's lightness with his scholarship comes hard to Wilson, who reveres and proclaims his own self-taught erudition."[4] This doubtless refers to Wilson's published accounts of his struggles with unusual languages like Magyar.

Edmund Wilson was not quite alone in his objections to LOTR. Philip Toynbee thought it "dull, ill-written, whimsical, and childish." Mark Roberts complained that the work lacked "relevance to the human condition"; it was "contrived" and "does not issue from an understanding of reality which is not to be denied. . . ."[5]

This sounds as if Roberts disapproved of all fiction save that which, so to speak, exposed conditions in the alarm-clock industry. If being set in an imaginary world makes a story "irrelevant," the same objection applies to any fictions other than those placed in the here-and-now. A story laid in feudal times would be "irrelevant," since we no longer have the feudal system.

IF WILSON, ROBERTS, and a few others disliked LOTR, a much larger band enthusiastically praised the work. A decade after the novel's cloth-bound appearance, paperbacked editions were published in the United States. These, to the delighted surprise of the publishers, became runaway best-sellers. This reprinting also incited a controversy.

When LOTR first appeared, neither Allen & Unwin in Britain nor Houghton Mifflin in the United States anticipated much demand for the books. Therefore the American edition consisted of sheets printed in the United Kingdom but bound in the United States. At the time of the importation, the "manufacturing clause" of the American copyright law withheld protection from works in English, printed outside the United States and imported into it, unless certain formalities were complied with. In addition, the publisher would have to begin publication of an American edition within a certain time.

This law, which discriminates against works printed abroad in English, has been kept in force for many years by the efforts of the printing unions' lobby. It was partly nullified by the Universal Copyright Convention, signed at Geneva in 1952; but this only became effective on September 16, 1955, too late to help the first two volumes of LOTR. (The third may have been protected.)

In the middle 1960s, two paperback publishers brought out editions of LOTR: Ballantine Books, which pub-

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lished under a normal royalty contract, and Ace Books, which published without any contract, assuming that LOTR was in public domain in the United States. Tolkien wrote in his introduction to the first Ballantine volume:

. . . it was the product of long labour, and like a simple-minded Hobbit I feel that it is, while I am still alive, my property in justice unaffected by copyright laws. It seems to me a grave discourtesy, to say no more, to issue my book without even a polite note informing me of the project: dealings one might expect of Saruman in his decay rather than from the defenders of the West. However it may be, this paperback edition and no other has been published with my consent and co-operation. Those who approve of courtesy (at least) to living authors will purchase it and no other.[6]

The paperbacked editions of the work had enormous success, especially among science-fiction fans and college students, to whose youthful minds its rather simplistic view of good and evil appealed. Sales ran into the millions. Science-fiction fans and and authors, stricken with sympathy for Professor Tolkien, vociferously sided with him against Ace Books, threatening Ace with boycotts. At last, Ace Books reached an agreement with Tolkien, paid him royalties on the copies already sold, and withdrew from further publication of LOTR.

JOHN RONALD REUEL TOLKIEN (1892–1971; "Ronald" to his friends) was born in Bloemfontein, South Africa, the son of a bank manager from Birmingham, England. Since young Tolkien's health was delicate, his mother took him, aged three, and his brother back to England. While they were gone, the older Tolkien died. Tolkien's mother stayed in Birmingham, taught school, and died in 1910.

Meanwhile Tolkien went through St. Edward's School, a Catholic institution in Birmingham; his parents had been converts. One of Tolkien's guardians was the Rev. Francis X. Morgan. Father Morgan strongly influenced him, so that he remained a devout and practicing Catholic.

Tolkien went to Oxford on a scholarship, graduated with honors from Exeter College in 1915, entered the Lancashire Fusiliers, married Edith Bratt, and served through the Kaiserian War. He was severely wounded and recovered, got his M.A. from Oxford in 1919, and settled into his lifelong role as a teacher. He never did take his Ph.D. and therefore was properly addressed as "Professor," not "Doctor."

Tolkien remembered his childhood with ambiguous feelings. He once said: "But no, it was not an unhappy childhood. It was full of tragedies but it didn't tot up to an unhappy childhood." Another time, however, he recalled his school days as "really a sad and troublous time."[7]

After getting his M.A., Tolkien's first job was as an assistant on the Oxford English Dictionary. Then he got a readership in English at the University of Leeds and settled into a comfortable academic career. In 1924 he was advanced to professor; in 1925 he moved to Pembroke College at Oxford, as Professor of Anglo-Saxon. There he remained for twenty years, until he moved to Merton College of Oxford University. He proved an excellent teacher.

Tolkien specialized in Old and Middle English and became prodigiously learned in all the Northern languages, literatures, and mythologies. His publications during this time included *A Middle-English Vocabulary* (1922), a critical text (with E. V. Gor-

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don) of the anonymous fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1925), "Chaucer as a Philologist" (1934), and "Beowulf: The Monster and the Critics" (1936).

Tolkien and his wife had four children, three boys and a girl. About 1933, Tolkien formed the habit of telling his children fairy tales about an imaginary milieu that he had invented, which he called Middle-Earth. It was placed—as far as it was connected with our present world at all—in a vaguely prehistoric time, perhaps before the last advance of the Pleistocene ice. Its being and nomenclature were largely derived from Norse mythology.

About 1936, Tolkien conceived the idea of making a book out of these tales. He was correcting examination papers at Merton—the most tedious of all professorial tasks. He said later:

"I came across a blank page someone had turned in—a boon to all exam markers. I turned it over and wrote on the back: 'In a hole in the ground there lives a Hobbit.' I'd never heard the word before."[8]

The resulting novel, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again,* appeared in 1937, with drawings and end-paper maps by Tolkien. It had, as noted, a gratifying success. The story begins:

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat; it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.[9]

The prose has a juvenile flavor, as if Tolkien were talking to his own children and improvising as he went along. This tone is maintained throughout. Tolkien often addresses the reader in the second person: "And what would you do, if an uninvited dwarf came in and hung his things up in your hall without a word of explanation?"[10] He also uses onomatopoea: "*ding-dong*" and so forth.

This may put off some adult readers, who consider it "talking down" or "writing down." The right tone for a children's book is a source of endless dispute. Not all adult literature is suitable for children; likewise, not all children's books are suitable for adults—none at all, apparently, for Edmund Wilson.

A few works can be read with pleasure by both, although the young reader may miss many allusions and meanings that he will grasp and enjoy when he re-reads the same work as an adult. *The Hobbit* comes close to this universal appeal, but it might have come closer if it had more sternly avoided this Disneyesque chattiness. On the other hand, while reading *The Hobbit* is not absolutely necessary for an appreciation of LOTR, it helps.

Hobbits, we learn, are a humanoid species about four feet tall, plump and round-faced, with large, hairy bare feet. They live in a bucolic land called the Shire, modeled on the English countryside. Tolkien points up the contrast between this landscape and that of smoky Birmingham, where he passed most of his childhood. Like Morris, Lovecraft, and C. S. Lewis, Tolkien was an unabashed rurophile. As the Durants once said: "Word peddlers tend to idealize the countryside, if they are exempt from its harassments, boredom, insects, and toil."[11]

Modern rurophiles, like Tolkien and Lovecraft, who condemn the Industrial Revolution and all its works, are in an anomalous position. Since 1800, when the Industrial Revolution was just getting under full steam, the world's population has quadrupled. Some of this increase can be credited to putting additional lands, like the American West, into cultivation; but most of it resulted from the Industrial

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Revolution.

To abolish modern machinery, therefore, would mean that the world could support only a fraction of its present population. The rurophiles do not say what to do with the rest. Let them starve? Shoot them? Eat them? The stand of a Catholic like Tolkien is especially illogical, because of his Church's adamant opposition to any practical, humane method of stopping the population explosion. All this, however, is off the track from heroic fantasy.

Hobbits live in cave or tunnel-houses excavated out of their fertile soil. They love eating, parties, and genealogy; like Lovecraft, they are sexually tepid. Nobody has to work hard there.

In fact, Tolkien's Hobbit heroes, Bilbo and Frodo Baggins, never work at all when home but live comfortably on their incomes. Along with the other blights of the higher civilizations, economics has never come to Hobbit-land. In a juvenile fairy tale, this is perhaps just as well, although it may bother some socially-conscious adult readers. Some, in fact, have taken Tolkien to task for complacently accepting class distinctions similar to those of Edwardian England. This is silly, because class distinctions have existed in all human societies above those of the most primitive hunter-gatherers. Doing away with the ruling class has merely resulted in putting another ruling class, called by another name like "commissars," in its place.

Bilbo's placid, unadventurous life continues for decades, until one day he receives a visitor:

All that the unsuspecting Bilbo saw that morning was a little old man with a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which his long white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots.[12]

The newcomer is Gandalf, once well known to the Hobbits for his displays of fireworks and his tales of wild adventures, but whom Bilbo has almost forgotten. Next day, Gandalf is back with thirteen Dwarves, similar to the gnomes of other fantasies: Dwalin, Balin, Kili, Fili, Dori, Nori, Ori, Oin, Gloin, Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, and an important Dwarf chieftain, Thorin Oakenshield.

These names are straight out of Norse mythology. The great thirteenth-century Icelandic historian and mythographer, Snorri Sturluson, lists over sixty Dwarves, including those mentioned by Tolkien, in a catalogue in his *Prose Edda*. A similar list occurs, with variations, in the earlier *Poetic Edda*, doubtfully attributed to another Icelander, Saemund the Wise. Gandalf is one of the dwarves in these lists. The name is also a perfectly good Old Norse one; a King Gandalf Alfgeirson of Ranrike was slain in the late ninth century by Harald Fairhair, when the latter was conquering and uniting all of Norway.[13]

Gandalf and the Dwarves enlist Bilbo, against the latter's better judgment, in a quest to recover the Dwarves' treasure from the dragon Smaug. This monster, whose greatest pleasure (like Fáfnir's) is to sleep on a heap of gold and gems, drove the Dwarves' forebears out of their caverns in the Lonely Mountain and took their hoard for himself.

Off they go, only to be captured by a gang of trolls. The Cockney-speaking trolls, named Bert, Tom, and William, prepare to eat their captives. The victims are rescued by Gandalf, who by ventriloquism gets the trolls to quarreling until the sun comes up and turns them to stone. (In the *Poetic Edda*, it is Dwarves who are petrified by sunlight.)

At Rivendell, at the foot of the Misty Mountains, they are enter-

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tained by Elrond, a half-elf. In the mountains, Bilbo and the Dwarves, who do not act like very competent adventurers, are captured by goblins. Again Gandalf rescues them. In the flight underground, Bilbo loses his companions and, groping in the dark, finds a ring.

Bilbo next meets an ex-Hobbit, Gollum, who lives underground. Gollum subsists on fish and, when he can sneak up and strangle them, on goblins. He tries the same on Bilbo, who holds him off with a riddle game. Bilbo discovers that the ring he has found was recently lost by Gollum and, when put on, makes one invisible. By its aid, he escapes from Gollum and the goblins.

The reunited party encounters wolves, eagles, and a friendly werebear. Giant spiders waylay them in sinister Mirkwood. This name, too, comes from Norse myth; in the Icelandic *Lokasenna*, Loki declaims:

> The daughter of Gymir with gold didst thou buy
> And sold thy sword to boot;
> But when Muspell's sons through Myrkwood ride,
> Thou shalt weaponless wait, poor wretch.[14]

The adventurers are imprisoned by Elves—not butterfly-sized Little Folk, but man-sized, suspicious, immortal, and magically potent. Escaping to the lake town of Esgaroth, on Long Lake, they get help from the people (ordinary human beings) for their assault on Smaug.

Bilbo burgles the dragon's lair and steals a gewgaw. Suspecting the Lake Towners, Smaug destroys the town but is slain by the captain of their archers.

A quarrel arises among the surviving townsfolk and the avaricious Dwarves over Smaug's treasure. Before they come to blows, they are attacked by hordes of wolves and goblins.

In the end, Bilbo is happily back in his hole. In later editions of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien made changes to eliminate inconsistencies with LOTR.

AT OXFORD, Tolkien became a member of one of those persistent discussion groups that spring up wherever enough articulate intellectuals are gathered to keep the group going. There have been many such coteries, like Lovecraft's Kalem Club and Howard's Junto, with varying degrees of organization and formality. The one at Oxford was called the Inklings.

The Inklings met on Thursday evenings, usually in the rooms of Tolkien's fellow professor, C. S. Lewis, but sometimes in a pub like The Eagle and Child. Old-fashioned English pubs had a semi-private room for such gatherings. On Tuesday mornings, less formal meetings were held at the Eagle and Child.

As far as the group had a leader, this was Clive ("Jack") Staples Lewis (1898–1963). Lewis, the son of a Belfast solicitor, went to Oxford, left to serve in the Kaiserian War as an officer, returned to complete his education, and graduated with honors. He taught at Oxford from 1924 to 1954, when he switched to Cambridge. A bachelor most of his life, in 1957, when he was nearing sixty, he married an American poetess, Joy Davidman Goesham. She died three years later, and Lewis followed her on November 22, 1963—the day of the deaths of John F. Kennedy and Aldous Huxley.

An atheist in his youth, Lewis investigated theology and converted himself back to Anglican Christianity. He became convinced of its truth, he said, while on his way to the zoo one day; on his own account, however, his

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conversion seems to have been an emotional compulsion rather than a logical necessity. Zeal for his faith formed a major element in his novels.

Most of these tales may be classed as theological fantasies. Seven were the juvenile fairy tales of the Narnia series. In these, a group of children find themselves in the parallel world of Narnia, with witches, talking animals, and similar wonders. The dominant figure is a super-lion, Aslan (presumably from the Turkish *arslan*, "lion"). Aslan, it turns out, is another incarnation of Christ. Although these stories have enjoyed considerable popularity, I cannot say that I care for them. Like Tolkien, I find them didactically "too explicit."

Lewis also wrote three adult science-fiction novels, the Perelandra or Ransom series. Strictly speaking, they are, like many of Lovecraft's stories, on the borderline between science fiction and fantasy.

In the first of the trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1943), the evil scientist Weston sends the protagonist Ransom to Mars. There Ransom finds a beautiful world, where all life cooperates under the guidance of the planetary ruling spirit or Eldil. Weston follows and begins shooting the natives until this spirit stops him. Ransom learns that things are not so harmonious on earth because our planet's Eldil has become "bent"—that is, wicked or psychotic. This is Christianity with touches of Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism—both of which, to be sure, influenced early Christianity.

In *Perelandra, World of the New Temptation* (1944), Ransom goes to Venus, a planet of vegetable islands floating in a world-wide ocean. Ransom meets the Venerian Eve, a beautiful green girl. Satan (the Terran Eldil), having taken possession of Weston's body, turns up and tempts the green girl by suggesting that she wear clothes.

The last of the trilogy, *That Hideous Strength* (1946), takes place on earth. A gang of evil scientists is gaining control of Britain by means of a National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments, or N.I.C.E. Ransom leads a group opposing the N.I.C.E. The cast also includes Merlin the enchanter, the severed but living head of an evil scientist, and Horace Jules, the figurehead director of the N.I.C.E. Jules, a pudgy little man who speaks Cockney and pontificates on things he knows nothing about, is a venomous caricature of H. G. Wells.

Lewis, in his way, was an able and erudite novelist. The first two Ransom novels, however, sag under the author's didacticism. His Mars and Venus, which have never known the Fall, are such pretty, perfect worlds as to be insipid. Lewis also uses symbolic names for his characters, "Weston" standing for "Western" (modern industrial) culture. This is what writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did, with their Squire Allworthys, Lady Sheerwells, and Captain O'Triggers.

Lewis's villains are scientists, to whom he attributes such outré intentions as exterminating all unnecessary plant and animal species and all backward races of man. Science-fiction writers, says Lewis, are "obsessed with the idea . . . that humanity, having sufficiently corrupted the planet where it arose, must at all costs contrive to seed itself over a larger area. . . ." His books may be classed as anti-science fiction, of the kind written by Aldous Huxley and Ray Bradbury.

Still, whether one agrees with its premises, *That Hideous Strength* is an extraordinarily good gripping piece of storytelling.

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Another Inkling was Charles Williams (1886–1945), an editor for the Oxford University Press. Williams had been compelled by poverty to drop out of Oxford. His wife refused to live in a small town and remained in London, whither Williams went on week ends to visit her and their son.

Williams wrote seven novels: erudite, subtle, moralistic, weighty, and slow-moving theological fantasies. *Shadows of Ecstasy* (1933) follows the spirit of a recently-dead girl and a world-conquering sorcerer. In *Many Dimensions*, the Stone of Solomon gets loose in modern London. In *The Place of the Lion* (1947), amateur theurgy causes the things of this world to merge back into their Platonic archetypes. Williams also wrote the non-fiction *Witchcraft* (1941), an excellent introduction to and history of this subject.

LEWIS WAS A close friend both of Williams and of Tolkien; Tolkien and Williams, while friendly, were not intimate. Tolkien, in denying that Williams had influenced his writing, said: "I didn't even know him very well." For that matter, Lewis while he acknowledged that he and Williams had influenced each other, asserted: "No one ever influenced Tolkien—you might as well try to influence a bandersnatch." He once told Tolkien: "Confound you, nobody can influence you. I have tried but it's no good."

Although critics have professed to detect the influence of various precursors, such as Coleridge, Morris, Macdonald, Yeats, and Chesterton in Tolkien's fiction, Tolkien himself denied any influences on him save the North European legends and Rider Haggard's *She*. Of Macdonald he said: "I now find that I can't stand George Macdonald's books at any price at all."[15]

In 1938, Tolkien was invited to give the annual Andrew Lang lecture at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. Lang (1844–1912) was an eminent Scottish writer, historian, journalist, mythographer, and poet. One of his monuments is a series of collections of fairy stories, gathered (with much help from his wife) from all over the world. These twelve volumes began with *The Blue Fairy Book* of 1889 and went on with the *Red*, the *Green*, and so on through the spectrum. (I had a copy of *The Red Fairy Book* as a child. It scared the daylights out of me, with its wicked stepmothers made to dance in red-hot iron shoes until they fell dead and its severed heads bouncing all over the place.)

Tolkien called his lecture, "On Fairy-Stories." Later he expanded and published it. He began by explaining that he did not necessarily mean a story about the Little Folk.

A fairy story, in Tolkien's sense, meant a story about Faërie, Elfland, the land of enchantment and imagination, filled with unearthly joys and sorrows and beauties and perils.

In that realm a man may, perhaps, count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very richness and strangeness tie the tongue of a traveller who would report them. And while he is there it is dangerous for him to ask too many questions, lest the gates should be shut and the keys be lost.[16]

Not all children, any more than all adults, enjoy such fiction. The main distinction of Faërie from the everyday world, says Tolkien, is that it contains magic that works. The writer must take his magic seriously and neither laugh at it nor explain it away. Hence dream narratives (like Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books), beast fables (like those of Peter Rabbit), and travelers' tall tales (like those of Captain Gulliver) do not qualify.

Tolkien discussed what he consid-

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ered the purposes of a fairy story. These are three: Recovery, Escape, and Consolation.

Recovery, he said, was the regaining of a clear view of the things of this world, which he called the Primary World, by living for a while in an imaginary Secondary World. One might liken it to stirring up one's sense of wonder so that one can view commonplace things with it. "We should look at green again, and be startled (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red. . . .We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness." In an oft-quoted sentence, he concludes: "By the forging of Gram cold iron was revealed; by the making of Pegasus horses were ennobled; in the Trees of the Sun and Moon root and stock, flower and fruit are manifested in glory."[17]

Next is Escape. People have a deep desire to do many things that they cannot do in the Primary World: to plumb the depths of time and space; to converse with non-human intelligences; and to live forever. Fairy stories provide these, at least while the reader is immersed in them. In his own childhood, Tolkien said:

I desired dragons with profound desire. Of course, I in my timid body did not wish to have them in the neighborhood, intruding into my relatively safe world, in which it was, for instance, possible to read stories in peace of mind. But the world that contained even the imagination of Fáfnir was richer and more beautiful, at whatever the cost and peril.[18]

As for those who condemned imaginative fiction as "escapist," (like Roberts, who complained of LOTR's lack of "relevance"), that, said Tolkien, was the point: "Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls?" To Tolkien and like-minded persons, life in the Industrial Age had some of the qualities of life in prison.

And then there was Consolation: the Happy Ending. We all know that, in real life, everybody dies. Tolkien calls the happy ending a "eucatastrophe." In Greek, *katastrophê* meant literally "an overturn" and figuratively the end of a play, when its plot was resolved. A "eucatastrophe" would be a "good outcome" or "happy ending."

Tolkien viewed a fictional eucatastrophe as an echo of the story of the Resurrection in the Gospels. "But this story is supreme; and it is true."[19] This was a rare occasion on which Tolkien explicitly showed his Christianity.

He discussed the problems of composing a fairy story that should, while the reader was immersed in it, seem real to him. The writer is a "Sub-creator," creating a Secondary World, real to the reader while he reads. To make such a world convincing, the writer must take great care to have it self-consistent and logically thought out. In this sense, to make such a world is harder than to spin a yarn about everyday events in the here-and-now, where the ordinary laws of cause and effect are known and agreed upon.

AT THE Thursday night meetings of the Inklings, members lit pipes and addressed themselves to their tea. Then C. S. Lewis would ask: "Well, has nobody got anything to read us?"[20]

Out would come manuscripts. Members were candid to the point of brutality in their criticisms.

In 1938, after finishing *The Hobbit*, Tolkien began reading selections from what the members called "his new

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Hobbit." It was *The Fellowship of the Ring*. When he gave his lecture at St. Andrews, said Tolkien: "At about that time we had reached Bree, and I had no more notion than they had of what had become of Gandalf or who Strider was; and I had begun to despair of surviving to find out."[21]

The other members found that it did no good to give Tolkien the sort of criticism they were used to. Either he ignored it altogether or got discouraged, discarded the piece he had read, and started over.

Tolkien worked on his gargantuan novel off and on through the Hitlerian War and the bleak period of shortages afterwards, when Britons had to learn to breakfast on baked beans. When he finally turned the work in to the publishers, he said, it was like having "a great tumor" removed.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING starts with a Prologue, in which Tolkien describes Hobbits and their Shire and summarizes the story of *The Hobbit*. Then the tale proper begins:

When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End announced that he would shortly be celebrating his eleventy-first birthday with a party of special magnificence, there was much talk and excitement in Hobbiton.

Bilbo was very rich and very peculiar, and had been the wonder of the Shire for sixty years, ever since his remarkable disappearance and unexpected return. The riches he had brought back from his travels had now become a local legend, and it was popularly believed, whatever the old folk might say, that the Hill at Bag End was full of tunnels stuffed with treasure. And if that was not enough for fame, there was also his prolonged vigour to marvel at. . . .At ninety he was much the same as at fifty. At ninety-nine they began to call him well-preserved, but unchanged would have been nearer the mark.[22]

Thus leisurely the story opens. Some readers may be put off by the kiddie-book tone, but if they persevere through the first chapter of fifty pages, the juvenility clears away. Tolkien's Secondary World is envisaged in great and plausible detail.

The story line parallels that of *The Hobbit*, although on a vaster scale. This time, the Quest is not to get something but to get rid of something.

Bilbo takes the occasion of his party to disappear, by means of Gollum's ring, in front of his guests. He means to go away, to wild, mountainous country and finish his book on the adventures narrated in *The Hobbit*. He has promised Gandalf to leave the ring to Frodo, a younger cousin whom he had made his heir. ("Frodo" comes from the Old Norse names "Frodhi" and Frodha," related to the adjective *frodhe*, "wise," Tolkien explains in an appendix that he had changed the final vowel to *o* to make the name sound more masculine to English-speaking readers.)[23]

Years later, Gandalf comes to see Frodo. Like Bilbo, Frodo has shown a remarkable resistance to aging. Gandalf explains that this is an effect of the ring, which is the One Ring made by Sauron, the Dark Lord, briefly referred to in *The Hobbit* as the Necromancer. ("Sauron" comes from the Greek *sauros*, "lizard.") This being, an incarnation of evil, was killed once, centuries before, in a war involving Elves and men; but he had not stayed dead.

The One Ring is one of twenty magical rings, distributed among men, Elves, and Dwarves. Possession of the One Ring will enable Sauron to enslave the Earth. Like the Heart of Ahriman in Howard's *Conan the Conqueror*, the One Ring has a mind

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of its own. It has a knack of getting itself found by people who could be tempted into taking it back to Sauron.

Early readers of *The Lord of the Rings* could not help seeing parallels with their own recent history, with the Ring playing the rôle of the Bomb. Tolkien emphatically denied any such attention. He had, he said, no use whatever for allegory and did not mean his story to be interpreted as such.

Still, it is hard not to think of Sauron as a fictional prototype of Adolf Hitler, the most Satanic figure of modern history. Moreover, despite his disclaimer, Tolkien did write two short stories, "Leaf by Niggle" (1947) and "Smith of Wooton Manor" (1967), which are as plainly allegorical as anything could be.

Gandalf tells Frodo that the world's only hope is to cast the One Ring into the Cracks of Doom in the volcano Orodruin, in Sauron's land of Mordor. That is the only fire hot enough to melt it.

After more delay, Frodo sets off with Sam Gamgee, a local gardener who acts as Frodo's squire, and two younger cousins.

They head for Rivendell, where Bilbo lives in retirement. On the way, they are menaced by the Black Riders, servants of Sauron. They are saved from graveyard spooks called barrow wights by Tom Bombadil, a kind of timeless nature spirit, whose irrepressible jolliness becomes a bit tiresome.

At Bree, they fall in with a weather-beaten Ranger, locally called Strider. This man turns out to be Aragorn, heir to the throne of the southern kingdom of Gondor. After more perils, they attend a council of Hobbits, Elves, and men at Rivendell, to plan a campaign against Sauron.

After much discussion and recapitulation of the history of Middle-Earth, a party of nine sets out to destroy the One Ring. These are Gandalf and Aragorn; an Elf, Legolas; Gimli, a Dwarf; Boromir, a lord of Gondor; and Sam, Frodo, and Frodo's two young cousins. (Gimli or Gimlé is a place mentioned in the Eddas.) Elves and Dwarves normally dislike each other, but the growth of friendship between Legolas and Gimli is one theme of the story.

Then come tremendous adventures. In the underground realm of Moria, built by Dwarves before they were driven out, the Fellowship are attacked by goblins. In this story, goblins are called by the Elvish name of "Orcs" (from Latin *orcus*, "Hades," "death," "Pluto," cognate with "ogre"). Perhaps Tolkien had decided that "goblin" had too light and humorous a connotation. Wolves are now called "wargs" (Anglo-Saxon *wearg*, "criminal").

While Tolkien can build up excellent suspense and sense of danger, his orcs, when they appear, are too easily slaughtered to be fictionally effective menaces.

In conflict with a kind of demon called a Balrog, Gandalf falls into an abyss. The Balrog, mostly made of flame and smoke, seems to be original with Tolkien, unless by some remote chance it is derived from the Boyg (Norwegian *Böig*). This is an invisible monster, with whom Peer Gynt grapples in Act II, Scene 7 of Ibsen's play and in the Norse folk tales on which the play is based.

The rest find refuge in Lothlórien, ruled by an Elven king and queen. When they leave, divisions arise. The party splits up. Boromir, overcome by greed, tries to rob Frodo of the ring. Frodo escapes, invisible. He and Sam flee towards Mordor, while the rest head for Gondor, threatened by Sauron's forces.

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In *The Two Towers*, Boromir, repenting his evil deed, is slain by Orcs while defending the two younger Hobbits. These are captured by Orcs, escape, encounter a race of treelike beings called Ents, and are finally reunited with Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli. The latter have taken part in a great battle. This battle was fought against the Orckish hordes by an army of heroic barbarians, the Rohirrim, who have Anglo-Saxon names but otherwise resemble the ancient Goths.

Gandalf, resurrected, rejoins them. It transpires that he is one of a group of white wizards, the five Istari, sent from higher quarters to guide Middle-Earth through its perils. The head of that Council was the wizard Saruman. But Saruman has become corrupted by greed and has formed an uneasy alliance with Sauron. Saruman holds sway from his own tower of Orthanc (Anglo-Saxon for "gadget") and is training his own army of Orcs. Gandalf has now been promoted into his place. Asked about Gandalf's resurrection, Tolkien said: "Gandalf is an angel."[24]

So, presumably, are the other wizards of the Council. So, too, are the remote superhuman beings called the Valar, who live in Valinor, the Blessed Realm or Undying Lands in the forbidden West. ("Valar" sounds suspiciously like the Old Norse *Valir*, "Frenchmen.")

The introduction of a land of immortality creates the same awkward complication in the story that it does in Morris's *Glittering Plain*. I think I have figured out why this element in some fantasies, as in those of Lloyd Alexander and L. Frank Baum, has always made me uneasy when I came across it. To a rationalistic reader, any problem can be solved, given enough time, by the application of intelligence. An Undying Land, which gives an intelligence infinite time in which to work, would enable that being to solve all problems, including such intractable ones as war and peace, the production and distribution of wealth, and the relations between the sexes. This being the case, what task could take precedence over attaining immortality? Or given the existence of an Undying Land, why have not all problems been solved?

The white wizard, of which Gandalf is an example, has long posed a puzzle for literary but pious Christians. The Churches long insisted that there was no such thing as white magic. Holy men might achieve miracles, with divine help; but all magic was performed with the help of devils and was therefore wicked. Still, there is an obvious place in fantasy for the good magician, and medieval romancers toyed with giving Merlin that rôle. Shakespeare finally broke the tabu with his Prospero, although, to placate critics, he has his wizard give up his magic at the end. (Prospero may be a combination of Merlin with Dr. John Dee, the scholarly Elizabethian astrologer and occultist). Since then the white wizard, long beard and all, has been a fixture in heroic fantasy. Gandalf's angelhood is Tolkien's way of getting around the contradiction with orthodox Christian doctrine.

While the Rohirrim and the Ents are overthrowing Saruman, Frodo and Sam struggle towards Mordor. They have many narrow escapes; the Black Riders, now mounted on pterosaurs (Mesozoic flying reptiles) shadow them. Their closest shave occurs when Frodo is paralyzed by the bite of Shelob, a giant spider who lairs on the borders of Mordor, and is seized by the Orcs.

The Return of the King tells of the final efforts of Sam and Frodo to reach Orodruin. They have been joined by Gollum, with whom they

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are on terms of unstable truce. At the same time, Aragorn's forces reach Gondor and take part in tremendous battles against the hosts of Mordor. These battles keep Sauron's attention fixed on Gondor, so that he fails to notice the approach of Frodo to Orodruin.

In the volcano, Frodo prepares to throw away the Ring; but its lure is too powerful. Instead, he puts it on, crying: "I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!"[25]

Gollum attacks Frodo, bites off Frodo's ring finger, and takes the Ring. As he capers in triumph, he falls over the edge into the lava. Sauron, having invested so much of his own power in the Ring, disintegrates, and his hosts disperse. The war is over.

Aragorn takes the throne of Gondor. He is now called Elessar, otherwise Dúnadan; several characters have a confusing multiplicity of names. Aragorn also weds his part-Elf longtime fiancée, Arwen. Frodo and the other Hobbits return to the Shire, which they find corrupted—that is to say, industrialized—by the fugitive Saruman.

That situation is soon put to rights. But Frodo has sustained a wound that can be healed only in the Elves's Grey Havens, in the West. The Elves set out on their final migration thither. Since Arwen has given up her place on the ship, Frodo is allowed to take it, and he passes beyond the ken of men.

This is but a sketch of this tremendous work. A vast amount of the history of Middle-Earth is brought into the story in driblets and is summarized in the appendices.

For example, there is the story of Númenor—Tolkien's Atlantis—sunk beneath the ocean, long before the time of LOTR, because its people, seeking immortality, tried to take the forbidden Undying Lands by storm. To an unbeliever who enjoys life, this seems an altogether reasonable desire; but theology finds abstruse reasons for condemning it.

Two of the realms of Middle-Earth were founded by survivors from Númenor. These are Arnor in the North, extinct in the time of LOTR, and Gondor in the South. (Arnor Thordson is a Norse skald in Snorri's *Heimskringla,* while Gondor is a province of Ethiopia.)

Sauron was not originally evil. He was probably, like Saruman, an angel gone wrong. He is not Satan; Gandalf explains that Sauron is merely the tool or emissary of another evil power.

At least a dozen books about Tolkien and LOTR have been published, as well as a multitude of articles. These explore every aspect of the work: literary, philosophical, religious, moral, and linguistic.

For example, Tolkien took pains with his invented languages, which furnished the core around which the novel crew. Elvish is a musical tongue, in which the consonants called "sonorants" (*l, m, n, ng,* and *r*) predominate. For instance, one stanza of the previously quoted Elvish song, in the original, is:

A! Elbereth Gilthoniel!
silivren penna mîriel
o menel aglar elenath,
Gilthoniel, A! Elbereth![26]

The harsh Orckish, on the other hand, is full of velar consonants: *k, g,* and their related fricatives or "gutturals," such as occur in some oriental languages.

In the appendices, Tolkien rides his philological hobby hard. We learn that the Rohirrim do not "really"

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speak Anglo-Saxon; Tolkien has just Saxonified their names to make them more familiar. Sam's name was not "really" Samwise but Banazîr, nicknamed "Ban," and Tolkien has Anglicized it. All of which seems a bit much.

LOTR is virtually as sexless as Lovecraft's writings. There are few women, no mothers, and not so much as a hint of mankind's ancient sport of fornication. Three of the main characters marry at the end, but in the most proper, decorous way.

In an adventure story, this is not necessarily a fault. Women's Lib to the contrary notwithstanding, it is a fact that men have, throughout history, lived on the average more active, adventurous lives than women, and that for a few simple, obvious reasons. It is only logical that adventure fiction should reflect this fact. The theme of manly comradeship in perilous adventure, without sexual implications, is an age-old and respectable one, whatever umbrage some contemporary critics may take at it.

In any case, saving the world from Sauron would keep anyone too busy to develop the arts of Don Juan de Tenorio. As my colleague Marion Zimmer Bradley has said: ". . . heroes of adventure fantasy are rarely comfortable figures among the ladies; and I don't know which pleases me the less: the treat-'em-rough tactics of Conan or Aragorn's embarrassed courtliness."[27] This is unfair to Conan, who has a rough sense of chivalry towards women and never maltreats them; but it expresses the right idea.

Several themes recur often in the story. Among these are the impermanence of men and their works; the value of heroism, resolute struggle, responsibility, and renunciation; the evils of possessiveness; and the permanence of evil. Sauron or his equivalent, no matter how often scotched, always bobs up again.

Critics have noted that Tolkien has skillfully combined Christian optimism with Northern pessimism. Norse myth looked forward, not to any Millennium or Second Coming, but to the eventual destruction of the earth and the principal gods in a final cosmic battle with the forces of evil. Others describe Tolkien's attitude as "Christian romanticism."[28]

Tolkien, unlike Lewis, keeps his religious orientation so well hidden that I had read the trilogy thrice and had met Tolkien without even suspecting his Catholicism. I first learned about it by reading Lewis. When an interviewer cornered Tolkien on this question, he finally replied: "I am a Christian and of course what I write will be from that essential viewpoint."[29]

I MET Tolkien in February, 1967, on my way back from India. Tolkien and I had corresponded. I had sent him a copy of my little anthology, *Swords and Sorcery*; he said he found it interesting but did not much like the stories in it. In particular, referring to *Distressing Tale of Thangobrind the Jeweller*, he spoke of "Dunsany's worst style," especially at the end, where Dunsany, for the sake of a joke, pricked his own illusion. When I said I should be in England, he invited me out.

I found Tolkien very cordial and friendly. He said: "You look just the way I pictured you. What do they call you? 'Sprague'?"

So we were "Sprague" and "Ronald" thenceforth. This rather surprised me, since Tolkien had a reputation for crustiness, and I always thought that the British were not so free with given names as Americans. Perhaps the fact that I was not trying to exploit him by pumping him for

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some project of my own had something to do with it. On a later occasion, he had tart words for one interviewer, who had, said Tolkien, "talked for hours about himself" and then gone off to write a notably superficial book on LOTR.

Tolkien was not altogether happy in his situation. His wife, whom I met, was badly crippled by arthritis, so that Tolkien had to do the housework. They were, however, proud of having just become great-grandparents. When Tolkien had become professor emeritus, Oxford had moved him out of the house he had occupied into a much smaller one, so that he had to convert the garage into a library.

We sat in the garage for a couple of hours, smoking pipes, drinking beer, and talking about a variety of things. Practically anything in English literature, from *Beowulf* down, Tolkien had read and could talk intelligently about. He indicated that he "rather liked" Howard's Conan stories.

I asked him two specific questions about LOTR. One was, why were the landscapes of Middle-Earth so devoid of large animal life? In the days before the population explosion and the perfection of the gun, practically all the earth's land surface, except for the most extremely dry, cold, or mountainous parts, swarmed with such megafauna.

This was true *a fortiori* back in the Pleistocene, before the wave of extinction at the end of that period. This Great Death, for example, eliminated mammoths, mastodons, ground sloths, camels, horses, tapirs, and giant species of peccary and beaver from North America, together with the lions, saber-toothed cats, and giant wolves that preyed upon them.

Tolkien and I agreed that this faunal poverty of Middle-Earth reflected Tolkien's memories of the English countryside in his boyhood. Save for two species of deer, large wild animals have been extinct in Britain for centuries.

The other question, which others have also brought up, was: Why did the Middle-Earthians have no formal religion, as all historical peoples have had, with temples, priests, rituals, and a hierarchy of gods?

I was not sure that I understood Tolkien's reply. He said something to the effect that in those days (he assumed) good and evil had not become so mixed up as they were later.

I left it at that. When I learned of Tolkien's Catholicism, however, much became clear. Some of the most effective writers of prehistoric or otherworld fantasy, like Dunsany, Lovecraft, Howard, and Leiber, have been unbelievers. Such skeptics could freely invent all the gods they pleased and give those gods whatever qualities their stories required.

A devout Christian or other monotheist, however, has a problem. He cannot make his people good Christians, Muslims, or Jews back in the Pleistocene or in a parallel world. If they worship "pagan" gods, he must make it plain that these gods are either demons in disguise or nonexistent, even though such a story could often make good use of a nice if fallible little godlet.

Tolkien sidestepped the issue by keeping his references to religion few and subdued. There are occasional allusions to Eru, or the One—that is, God. This God, however, seems an otiose deity, like that of the eighteenth-century Deists, who once wound up the universe but leaves its day-to-day running to subordinates.

The Valar and the Council of wizards are implicitly angels. They are supposed to guide and protect mankind, although they do a most incompetent job of it. The Elves sing to Elbereth, wife of Manwe and queen

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of the Valar, in terms that suggest a kind of prefiguration of the Virgin Mary. (And married angels?)

Another theme, which Tolkien touches in a gingerly way, is that of free will versus predestination or Fate. Bilbo and Frodo are repeatedly told that the things they do and suffer are part of a cosmic plan. At the end of *The Hobbit*, Gandalf tells Bilbo: "You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit? You are a very fine person, Mr. Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!"

Early in LOTR, Frodo tells Gandalf that he ought to have killed the sniveling, treacherous, murderous Gollum. Gandalf replies:

"Deserves it! I daresay he does. Many live that deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends. I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it. And he is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many—yours not the least."[30]

Sure enough, in the final scene in Orodruin, Gollum unwittingly saves Frodo from the loss of his own resolution to discard the Ring and also destroys it and himself. When free will fails to make the cosmic plan work, Fate—accident, coincidence—steps in to help.

This is convenient but not very convincing. The author assumes that good and evil are absolute values, not subjective or relative, and that there is a moral order in the universe. In other words, Fate is on the side of good. But, if theologically respectable, this idea is fictionally awkward. If the reader grasps it, then the feeling that God will save the characters is bound to take the edge off the suspense. In fact, Tolkien works the long arm of coincidence to the point of bursitis.

So, one might say, God must be working behind the scenes to make things come out right and provide these convenient happenstances. But that brings up a basic paradox, on which monotheistic theologians have broken their teeth for centuries. If God is all-good, all-wise, and all-powerful, how can evil exist? Or, if God runs things, why does he do such a sloppy job of it?

Theologians have propounded various answers. The standard Christian answer, for instance, is that God has given man free will, so that man can earn his salvation. But this is a mere quibble. If God is indeed all-wise, he knows exactly what any of his creatures will do in advance. If a man he has created does wrong, God is just as responsible as a mechanic, who knowingly assembles a faulty machine, is responsible for that machine's breakdown in use.

The Gnostic and Yezidi answer is that God delegates the running of the world to a subordinate, a Satan or an Eldil, whose incompetence or wickness causes the trouble. But this is just as much a quibble. Having made this subordinate, God also knows just what the retainer will do and what the results will be. The Maxdaists or Parsees say that Satan is an independent power, opposed to and more or less equal to God.

Or the theologian may try to turn off questions by saying: "It is mystery," "It is not meant for us to know." This is merely excusing ignorance by making a virtue of it and at the same time trying to shut off awk-

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ward questions.

Polytheists never had that trouble. They assumed that the gods were glorified human beings, with human lusts, vices, and follies. When things went awry, they could always say: "What can you expect, with a gang of idiotic gods like ours?"

When, however, the monotheistic faiths began competing for converts, they found that people would buy the biggest and shiniest God they could offer, regardless of logic. In the same way, a man may buy the biggest and shiniest automobile he can afford, even if it will not fit into his garage. The most marketable God proved to be an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God. Converts were not deterred by the state of the world, which implied that it could not possibly be run by a God having all those qualities at once. One or two, perhaps, but not all three.

A fairy story, however, is not really adapted to settling such philosophical questions. I bring them up only because Tolkien did, although he wisely did not try to solve them. In Faërie, as Tolkien says, "it is dangerous to ask too many questions."

ANOTHER ASPECT of LOTR is Tolkien's use of traditional versus original concepts. Edmund Wilson complained of the author's "poverty of invention." By this, I suppose Wilson meant that Tolkien stuck close to traditional themes and elements from existing myth and folklore.

Indeed, Tolkien does bring in a multitude of traditional elements: the Quest (compare the Argosy); the magical ring of invisibility (Gyges' ring); the ring that bears a curse (Andvari's ring); the hero's incurable wound (Philoktetes, Amfortas); the wicked, gold-hoarding dragon (Fáfnir);[31] the re-forging of the hero's broken sword (Sigurdh's Gram); the return of the True King (Odysseus); the hero's humorous, commonsensical lower-class retainer (Sancho Panza, Dunsany's Marano, Wodehouse's Jeeves); and others.

Traditional, too is Tolkien's making the swarthy southern Haradrim and the nomadic Easterlings villains, sent by Sauron against Gondor. Europe has a long tradition of invasions from the East and the South, by Persians, Carthaginians, Huns, Arabs, Mongols, and Turks, to whom the attackers of Gondor roughly correspond. An Asian or an African could, of course, present an equal bill of complaints against Europeans for invading and conquering his continent.

When Tolkien introduced original concepts, his results, in his critics' view, were mixed. Most approved of his Hobbits and Ents but were less impressed by Tom Bombadil, Shelob, and the Balrog.

An advantage of using traditional materials in their traditional rôles is that these things already have images and associations in the readers' minds. One need not describe a dragon in much detail, because nearly all readers have a mental picture of a dragon. The traditional materials also invoke strong feelings in the readers, because they stir up childhood memories, impressions, and emotions. (This may be less true than formerly, because the traditional tales, the stories of Odysseus and Sigurdh and Arthur, tend to be crowded out of children's usual reading by the enormous spate of new and more "relevant" juvenile writings by contemporary authors.)

On the other hand, too close an adherence to traditional precedents may make the work hackneyed. This applies not only to the concepts but also to the way in which they are used. Traditionally, wolves, reptiles, and spiders are all feared. Therefore they are easily made into symbols of

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evil, and thus Tolkien uses them. But a well-informed modern reader knows that all these animals have useful places in nature; that wolves, in their private lives, display many qualities admired among human beings; that most reptiles are not only harmless but also useful; and that spiders are effective foes of the more pestiferous insects. As somebody said in a Disney nature movie, there are no heroes or villains in nature.

A fantasist who wants to take advantage of modern knowledge may reverse the traditional rôles and put a dragon or a ghost on the hero's side instead of against him. In a minor fairy-story, *Farmer Giles of Ham* (1949), Tolkien did just that. After the king's gallant knights have failed to cope with the ravages of the dragon Chrysophylax, Farmer Giles subdues and domesticates the beast.

This suggests why Edmund Wilson admired Cabell but castigated Tolkien. Tolkien, with a few variations, sticks close to traditional materials, rôles, and themes.

Cabell, a man of thoroughly "modern" outlook, treats these materials in original, sophisticated ways. He stands them on their heads, burlesques them, and makes them ridiculous. In Cabell, the heroes of legend all have feet of clay, prominently displayed. The heroines are no better than they should be. And the Creator of the Universe turns out "not particularly intelligent . . . omnipotent . . . .well-meaning, but. . . .rather slow of apprehension." This realization "went far toward explaining a host of matters which had long puzzled Jurgen."[32]

Edmund Wilson evidently admired this approach but was bored by the older, more traditional one. A story that took the traditional materials seriously and upheld the moral values of the old epics and romances, he dismissed as "juvenile trash." Wilson—forward-looking, experimental, a tabu-breaker, a onetime admirer of Lenin—was not one who could become again as a little child, if only to enjoy a traditional fantasy. The loss was his.

So the writer of heroic fantasy has a choice. He can use traditional materials in traditional ways. This has the advantage of evoking already familiar images and childhood emotions in his readers. Or he can use these materials in modern, unconventional ways, using modern knowledge that did not exist in ancient and medieval times, when the traditional epics took form. This method gives the writer more scope for humor and originality, although he risks making his story trivial, because he cannot tap his readers' buried childhood memories and the emotions that go with them. Or he can use new materials, but in that case he may find himself writing science fiction instead of fantasy. Each course has its advantages. Tolkien chose the first method and did a bang-up job of it; others find the other approaches more congenial.

SOON AFTER my visit to Tolkien, he moved to Devonshire and holed up, hoping to be left alone so that he could finish a long-planned prequel to LOTR. This work (or works), variously called *The Silmarillion*, and *Alkalabêth*, is said to have been finished. But Tolkien, a perfectionist, kept working it over to assure its consistency with what he had already published about Middle-Earth.

He persuaded his publisher to screen his correspondence, since he had long been snowed under by letters from admirers. He disliked the Tolkien cult, with its clubs, its amateur publications, and its meticulous analyses of LOTR and of the author's motives and psychology. At least, he

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wished they would let him alone to get his work done.

In 1971, his wife died. At the beginning of 1972, he turned eighty and was named a Commander of the Order of the British Empire. In 1973, he quietly died. The editing of *The Silmarillion* passed to his second son, Christopher Tolkien—another Oxonian professor and by all accounts as meticulous a perfectionist as his sire.

In any large work, like LOTR, one can find flaws on re-reading. There are plenty in the Conan saga and in the works of Morris and Eddison. But one need not, while reading a heroic fantasy, worry about a few inconsistencies or philosophical contradictions. In this genre, few have equaled and none has surpassed LOTR in vividness, grandeur, and sheer readability. And that is accomplishment enough for any one man.

Notes:

1. Lin Carter: *Tolkien: A Look Behind the Lord of the Rings* (Ballantine, 1969), pp. 4f; R. J. Reilly, in Neil D. Isaacs & Rose A. Zimbardo: *Tolkien and the Critics*, p. 133.

2. Edmund Wilson: "Oo, Those Awful Orcs," *The Nation*, 14 Apr. 1956, pp. 312ff.

3. *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Houghton Mifflin), pp. 5, 89; (Ballantine), pp. vii, 117.

4. William Ready: *Understanding Tolkien and The Lord of the Rings* (Paperback Lib., 1969), p. 81.

5. Isaacs & Zimbardo, pp. 37, 134.

6. *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Ballantine), pp. xiif.

7. Ready, p. 10; J. R. R. Tolkien: *Tree and Leaf* (Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 42.

8. "Hobbits' Master Quietly Turns 80," in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 Jan. 1972, p. 6.

9. *The Hobbit* (Houghton Mifflin, 1937), p. 11.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

11. Will & Ariel Durant: *The Age of Voltaire* (1965), p. 45.

12. *The Hobbit*, p. 14.

13. Snorri Sturluson: *The Prose Edda* (Un. of Cal. Pr., 1954), pp. 41f; *Heimskringla*, III, i, ii; *Völuspá*, st. 10-15. "Gandalf" (spelled "Ganndalf" in the *Prose Edda*) means "mighty Elf."

14. *The Poetic Edda* (Princeton, 1936), stanza 42, p. 165. See also pp. 306, 476, 483. In the original (which I do not have before me) the name would have been something like "Myrkvidh."

15. C. S. Lewis: *Surprised by Joy* (Harcourt, Brace, 1955), p. 237; Edmund Fuller *et al.*: *Myth, Allegory, and Gospel* (Bethany Fellowship, 1974), p. 91; Carter, pp. 18ff.

16. Tolkien: *Tree and Leaf*, p. 3.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 57ff.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 72.

20. C. S. Lewis: *Letters of C. S. Lewis, apud* Glen GoodKnight: "The Social History of the Inklings," *Tolkien Journal*, No. 12 (Winter, 1970), p. 7.

21. Tolkien, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

22. *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Houghton Mifflin), p. 29; (Ballantine), p. 43.

23. I use *dh* to represent the Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Icelandic letter *edh*. The letters *edh* and *thorn* (used, although not consistently, for the *th* sounds of "this" and "thing") dropped out of English when Caxton brought printing to England in the 1470s and refused to use them, since they were not in his Flemish type font. Too bad; they would have been useful.

24. Edmund Fuller, in Isaacs & Zimbardo, p. 35.

25. *The Return of the King* (Houghton Mifflin), p. 223; (Ballantine), p. 274.

(cont. on page 122)

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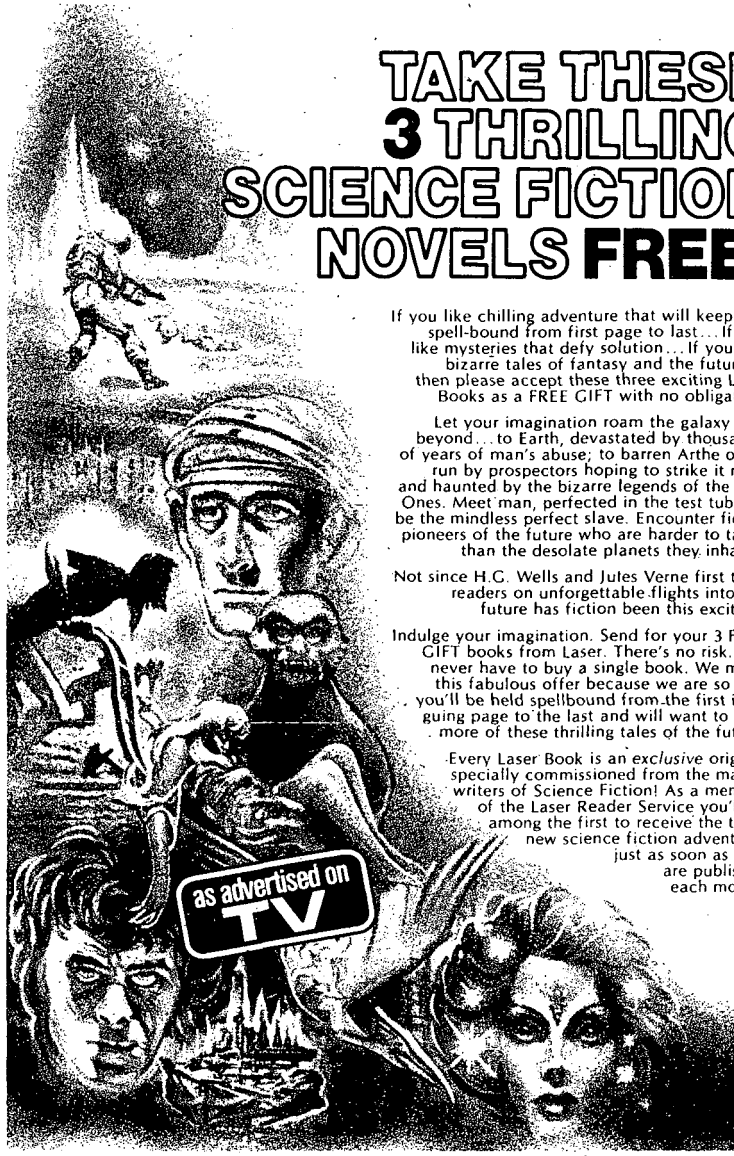

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Dennis More, whose "The Atheling's Wife" appeared here last issue continues the saga of Felimid the Bard, this time returning to the poin where we left him at the end of "Fugitives in Winter" (October, 1975 and filling in with the extraordinary adventures which betook him in—

THE FOREST OF ANDRED

DENNIS MORE

Illustrated by Steve Fabian

I

RAIN HAD PELTED all night and most of the morning and turned to sleet before it quit. Pale drops that fell pattering if shaken hung on every twig of the bare black trees. Leaf-mould squelched and oozed about the man's treading feet. His tattered cloak covered him with the scent and clinging embrace of wet wool to his glum displeasure. Sodden winters to him were much worse than brittle ones. The second sort at least can be pretty.

This winter had been fairly consistently of the first sort. Snow had lain on the ground but four times, lightly each time but the last, and always the bucketing sleety rain had come to turn it to slush and then mire. The hunting had been poor enough to starve a man less practiced in the forest's ways. This one had fed himself and a woman, to whom the forest was a haunt of demons and monsters, for weeks; but he was returning empty-handed now. He was not disappointed, for it was not unique.

The wilderness of oak, ash and thorn that men called the Forest of Andred might have been all there was. The Romans might never have conquered Britain; the Saxons might never have entered it. Here prowled clans of mandrake, the strange gnarled vegetable folk who mated like humans, whose dams borne not eggs or live little ones but seeds, to be planted in the earth and grow to the maturity of their kind, and whose cry stabbed through the ear to the brain like a murderously driven awl. Here trod the unicorn, with blue vapour curling from nostrils more soft than a woman's breast, with dainty precise hooves lethal as maces, a spiral horn with which he'd gore a man to the heart as readily as look at him, and legs he'd trustingly bend to lay his fine head in a virgin's lap. The man's opinion was that this was not wise. He'd known virgins less worthy of trust than the most vicious prostitute.

He was Felimid mac Fal, a bard out of Erin. His lean supple body was clad in cross-gartered wadmal trews, a wolfskin tunic and a cloak torn almost to bits. Bareheaded he was, brown haired, snub-nosed, long-jawed and usually shaven, but at present a short ginger beard covered half his face. His nimble sword was belted on the

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right side of him because he was left-handed, and the harp of his ancestor Cairbre rode on his back in a worn leather bag. He carried two hunting spears.

With circuitous caution he returned to the tiny hut he had built the day before. Its sunken stone-lined floor was domed over with a roof of woven branches on an upright central pole, and dug about with channels to drain off water. He approached warily because he was always wary, and doubly so here because the forest demanded it.

In the soaked earth he found long-toed footprints of a size to belong to a child eleven years old. His hut had been spied on since the rain had stopped less than two hours before. Not tensely, but like a lynx that suspects a trap, he moved out of hiding.

'Felimid?'

The voice was thick and phlegmy. Two little upright lines appeared above his nose as he entered the hut. Regan had complained that morning of a headache and pains in her joints, and by no just assessment could she be called a whiner. Afraid that she was ill, and because the bard was entitled to know, she had told him. He'd made her a pallet raised on a low frame of sticks to get air beneath her, and an extravagant fire to keep her warm and dry. Of necessity he'd left her to hunt.

But now Regan huddled in her grimy blankets. Hair black as a raven's wing was tousled about a small face flushed and streaming at the nose. Her eyes were evilly bright, and when he touched her she was hot as the stones of his improvised hearth. It was not good at all.

'I'm sorry.' Her voice was a froggy gulp. 'I'm too weak to move.'

'Rest you, then.' He gave her water, tucked her blankets more snugly about her and accepted the sour truth that he couldn't do more. They must remain where they were till Regan recovered, if she did, and if he did not contract the same fever. This made it imperative that he find food, and learn who had been spying on their hut.

'Regan, heart's delight, the hunt went badly. I'll have to be leaving you. Else we will be reduced to boiling my walrus-hide boots for soup, and that's no fare for the sick. Or the well. I'd be prostrated beside you, groaning.'

She managed a smile. 'With bare and freezing feet? Luck.'

That phrase of hers fixed itself in his mind and sounded repetitively there. *'Bare and freezing feet.'* He followed the tracks of such. Who'd walk unshod in winter from choice? Twice he lost the tracks, twice found them again by casting in circles, then lost them a third time. Half an hour it was before he solved the cunning misdirection with which his quarry had taken to the trees.

Felimid could do most things, but he'd no way to follow it there. By the size of its feet and the length of its stride it was much lighter than he. It could jump and whirl through high branches that wouldn't hold him if he were to fast for a month. He asked himself baffledly what sort of creature ran like a rabbit, yet climbed and leaped like a squirrel. The tree spirits endured a little death for the winter, most of them, and none made footprints; they were not of matter. This Felimid knew, being friendly with spirits of oak, yew and birch. But whatever this thing was, it had slipped him fairly, and might double back to where Regan huddled sick. Best return there now.

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A half-suffocated cry prompted him to hide. He made himself a shadow among shadows, and listened with ears honed by his chancy life. The cry was not repeated, but it had not come from a great distance. He investigated. He slid among wet undergrowth nigh dense as a wall, not fighting its impediment but avoiding it. He'd learned the trick from the Hidden People as a child. None the less it was hard, uncomfortable work. Neither skill nor practice in any degree can make squirming through soaked brush a pleasure. Felimid loved warm dry surroundings as well as anybody.

He squinted through long wet grass.

A web large as a sail was rigged between several dark trees, high up. The strands were thick as grey cords. Raindrops rolled beadlike along them, showing the web's outline, or Felimid had scarcely seen it. The maker and tenant clung like a shocking eight-pointed star in the center. Neatly wrapped and hung by the heels dangled its newest victim. The mysterious watcher, for a bet.

So much for him. He'd neither do harm to Felimid and Regan himself, nor betray them to others; but it had been a more than ordinarily dreadful way to die. The bard longed to run, but he held his limbs immobile and used his shaken mind. He didn't want that patient monster's unimaginable senses to discover him. *Eochaid Ollathair*! Lord of Life and Death! The size of it!

The size, yes. Common spiders lived on such flies as blundered into their webs, and maybe this one caught occasional birds and squirrels that way, but their few juices would not serve its hunger. It must find larger prey—on the ground. Its web was its castle, a useful vantage and place of safety which it ruled as tyrant, but rarely and incidentally a trap. Its real traps were on the ground where Felimid was.

The skin rippled cold on his flesh. He imagined hidden nets for careless feet, loops fashioned and set with a hangman's craft, the least disturbance of any communicated to those eight clawed legs, more alert on the lines than a fisherman's fingers. By luck he'd come this near and avoided them. It would be a tenser business to avoid them by design as he left, knowing they were all about.

It was, and they were; and he did not.

His continual upward looks to be sure the horror was not springing on his back undid him. His foot met a sudden, elastic tension, a coil whipped around his ankle in a living grip, he was snatched into the air with a suddenness that pulled muscles and tendons and almost dislocated his hip, and hung head down feeling stupid. The spider scuttled on one of its self-spun roads to make sure of its victim. The cord sagged and hummed with its weight.

Felimid writhed. Lean and quick like his bearer, the sword Cat slid into Felimid's hand with a blue glimmer of steel and a white flash of inalid silver inscriptions running along the blade. The spider's rope parted singing bare inches from Felimid's ankle. He fell, twisting to land on his feet. He dropped among crackling brambles, and his luck was astonishing that he did not impale himself on the sword. He shot upright, and a sudden fire of agony burned all the way from his heel to the nape of his neck. Dim red suns blurred his vision, and tears blurred the red suns. Beyond both he saw the spider, legs gathered under

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it, clasping a centuried tree like prey. Brief but vivid and unforgettable was that glimpse.

From jaws to anus it was maybe five feet long. The span of its legs extended was much more. They were far thicker in proportion than the legs of its tiny kindred, armed with serrations of chitin and sprouting bristles sharp as pins. Its eyes had a hundred blue-green facets each, all glittering with hunger. Its hard-shelled thorax had bristles like those on its legs, but its belly was a rounded weighty sack a yard wide, with skin tougher and thicker than oxhide and a pelt of obscenely soft brown fur. Its flexing mandibles and the joints of its eight bent legs were vermilion red.

It did not leap on him. It had too much wicked intelligence for that. It would have landed at least as hard as Felimid, and maybe broken a few of its legs, that in truth were less strongly made than his. It scrambled with ugly deliberation down the trunk.

Felimid had lost both boar-spear and javelin. With fingers that felt like sausages he unbuckled his scabbard and let it fall, while his eyes quested for the monster now hiding in the tangled brush. Fear was a taste of tarnished copper in his mouth. If the thing was accustomed to stalking, if it had not always relied on snares to take its prey, then the land would be poorer this day by one matchless bard. *How silently can that horror move?*

The butt of the boar-spear poked up from a hawthorn bush. The bard breathed thanks, and took it behind the cross-piece with his right hand while Cat waited eagerly in his left. He set his back against an enormous tree. Waking nightmares at once assailed him of a noose dropped over his head from above, or more than one of the monsters hunting him. His ankle pained ferociously. It wouldn't bear an ounce of weight. Darkly he thought that it might be broken. That would be wonderful; that would be fine indeed.

The spider came rustling out of the dense bushes to face Felimid no more than thrice its own length away. It rushed upon him with terrifying speed.

Felimid had barely time to ground the butt of the boar-spear and guide the point under the thorax. To face those clashing mandibles and deadly eyes with his mind in control and his own eyes open was no meager thing. The spearhead ripped through abdominal hide and pierced deep, deep, driven by the spider's own impetus, till it came to the tough cross-piece that prevented its charging all the way up the impaling spear-shaft, to fang the soft creature that had hurt it. The horror shrieked, foaming spittle and poison. It reached for the bard with its long forelegs to drag him close. Cat whirled left and right in a double loop to the noise of shattering chitin, and two clawed feet were ruined. Two more seized roots, stones, anything, and began to drag the loathy carcass towards Felimid in spite of the boar-spear. Felimid swung Cat in both hands, pivoting on his good leg, and split the thorax between those intelligently hating eyes, just as the spear snapped in two. The spider fell back on its hind legs, sundered face to the sky. Felimid wisely dodged around the immense trunk of the tree. The spider tried to dislodge the sword with its maimed forelegs as though preening itself. The weapon came out at last.

The spider clambered slowly aloft on the strands of its web. It moved

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clumsily now. It suddenly lost its footing, toppled, became enmeshed. Its struggles entangled it the more.

It's told that spiders are immune to the adhesion of their own webs. This is not true. They spin stickly threads to trap their food, and clean ones by which they move to and fro, but only they know them apart, and if they are too mazed by mortal pain and weakness to discriminate, then they are lost.

The spider hung between the trees, legs twitching slowly, and dripped green ooze.

Felimid was convulsively sick. Feeling better, he cleaned the befouled sword in wet black earth, and sheathed him and buckled him on. Then he investigated the ground beneath the huge web.

It was littered with bones. He saw the heavy rib cage of a bear, the antlered skull of a hart. He recognised the bones of men. Certain of their accoutrements had lasted a long time: he dug up a great oblong shield of the Roman kind, much corroded, and a horned bronze helmet far older. He looked up at the gigantic trees, more antique than any of these things. He wondered how long the spider had haunted the place, and how a legionary of Rome had happened to die there. It was like inscribing the last word on a page of history. Page? A long and gruesome chapter, by the signs.

Cermait! The spider's last victim was twitching in his grey shroud, wriggling upside down! The bard inadverdently put weight on his hurt ankle, and hissed obscenities. He couldn't climb. He'd be needing a crutch even to walk. The web was already damaged by its weaver's death-struggle, so Felimid cut some of its anchoring strands until the captive dropped within his reach. It's likely that no sword but Cat could have severed that fibber.

'Arr!' the boy declared.

'A feverish woman, a cripple, and a mute,' Felimid said. 'What a band of incapables! But there, I've satisfied myself that you are no threat, save to snails and acorns. Go where you please.'

The boy, when released, did not pause, or hesitate, or dither. He bolted at once. He ran up a tree-trunk without seeming to touch it, sprang from bough to bough and vanished. The bard blinked twice at the celerity of it, by which time there was nothing to see.

His efforts at gathering food in the hour left before night had meager profit. He slept hungry, and awoke flushed and groggy with what he recognised as the first signs of Regan's illness. It was raining again, a slow thin drizzle so closely blended with pale mist as to be indistinguishable from it, stifling vision and breath as surely as the slain monster's cobwebs, but even less palpable and much much colder. It pierced the flesh like water seeping into permeable clay.

Lung fever in it, or my name's not Felimid. It's all we lacked. Gods and demons, she would come with me! She would insist that returning to her own people was worth the risk. It's scarcely my fault if she dies coughing. Or hers, be just.

A tour of the traps and snares he'd set did not encourage hope. They were empty, all. He wondered involuntarily about the spider. Would the meat of its legs, for example, be so very different from lobster or crab? He didn't care for the notion, but rather than starve he'd certainly test it.

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II

'GIVE YOU good day.'

Deep, thick and reverberating was that voice, not like bell or gong, but like a drum of thick hide stretched on heavy, resonant wood. Like Kisumola the wizard's drum. That was enough to make Felimid mistrust it before he had even identified the similarity with his mind. Cat shone bare. Mist condensed at once along his blade, dimming his mirror brightness. Felimid stared suspiciously at the vague bulk under the dripping trees.

'Your thoughts do not appear to please you.'

'Who's there?' he demanded. He cursed his clogged head. He'd no business to let anybody this close without seeing him, or her, or it; unless they had magic, as he strongly hoped they did not. He'd been approached openly, this time.

Next time—

The stranger came ponderously forward. Large he was, even gross, though less tall than Felimid. His earth-stained robe was of coarse brown wool. He carried a rowan staff in thick nailless fingers with webs of horny skin between them. He'd a big loose mouth drooping at the corners, a wide flat nose with nostrils as hairy as his ears, coarse pitted skin, almost no chin and a wholly bald head. His bulging brown eyes were oddly flecked with grey. His grin showed brown teeth, discoloured but strong and sound.

'Scabbard your sword! Pendor am I; physician, herb-doctor, apothecary and banished exile. You need not fear me. Nay, in your predicament you should be glad of my coming. The forest is not a kindly place.'

'It's been gentle enough with me, thus far,' Felimid croaked. 'As for your coming, so that you be all you claim, it's timely indeed; a bit too timely. How did you find me?'

'Look above you.'

Felimid at once looked behind him, suspecting trickery. Not until he knew it was safe did he do as Pendor suggested. The spider's almost-victim watched in fascination from high branches. Was this for yesterday's rescue, a favour for a favour? Not likely, Felimid thought. Even if the boy's mind could know what was needed, one might as well expect gratitude from a wild cat. A better supposition was that Pendor had won his trust and trained him to some degree. Pendor knew something of what he lightly called their predicament, or he wouldn't have been there; he had more than a rowan staff to defend him, or he wouldn't have shown himself so freely. No matter. His help couldn't be refused, if he really had the skills he boasted.

'Yes, I have met him,' Felimid said. 'I call him Kev. Once I tended him when he was terribly injured; he has repaid me. He's my eyes and ears for much that happens in this forest. He cannot speak, he has never learned how, and it's too late to teach him, but he has learned to know what a few phrases mean. For my part I have learned to pay attention when he seems uneasy or aroused. He came to my garden yester-eve with cobwebs upon him. He grunted and gestured, but I could not decipher his meaning. I listened to the mandrakes mutter in the night, and to the wind in the rattling trees. I took—other counsel. You have slain the spider that haunted this shunned and loathy part of the forest. You delivered Kev from a foul death, and were injured. You have a sick woman on your hands.'

'What a lot you know.'

'I do not know your name,' Pendor

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hinted.

Felimid was not willing to make the man a gift of that on such short acquaintance. 'Titus will serve.'

'But of course it is not your own, ha? This is mistrust, my friend. This is lack of faith.'

'This is caution,' the bard retorted. 'What of you? Have you gone by Pendor all your life?'

'Let's not discuss that. Are you willing, mistrusting me so, to come to my cottage? Or shall I leave you? It's of no great importance to me.'

'Oh, most willing! But how? Regan can't walk and I must hobble.'

Malediction! He'd given away Regan's true name. His beginning illness was clouding his mind, surely. But magic was less a part of her life than of his. Blood of the Sun People ran in his body, but he was largely a being of night and the earth. Without the Sun there would be no shadows. Trees needed Earth and Sun, were at peace with both. Why did they combine in him to make a restlessness that could not be eased? But then, he was not a tree . . .

What had that to do with anything? He was lightheaded.

Pendor held his staff above his head in both hands. 'Basket, come do my bidding!' he commanded.

A shape woven of withies, like a great long shield without its leather covering, came drifting waisthigh through the air. Its pattern was symmetrical and yet baffling to sight. No cut ends of wicker were visible; the whole might have been twisted from one large pliant hoop. Its concavity was about a foot deep, and partly filled with furs.

'I've knowledge of magic, besides my other accomplishments,' Pendor said. 'You shall ride.'

And they did ride. Pendor lifted Regan from the hut and placed her in the basket with Felimid, at which it sagged nearer the earth. Then he set off, leading the way at a stumping dogged pace extravagant of strength, but he seemed to have plenty to spend. It was like being towed steadily through a tideless bog in a tiny boat by a creature half man, half frog. Felimid slid his bright blade free beneath the hides and furs covering him. The last man with whom he had guested had hung him by the heels above a wolf pit. Pendor's ugliness was nothing against him—he might be benevolent—but the bard did not enjoy the sense of being in his hands.

The trail was dim, narrow, twisting, the work of deer and elk through all the years the oaks had been growing, and these had the mass and presence of ages. Roots thick as Felimid's body writhed in the ground with a movement too slow for his hurtling perceptions. Moss was deep and soft as a bed on weathered boles. Mistletoe flowered yellow, trailing in luxury from hawthorn and linden. The oaks were bare of it. Seldom does the slow strangler attack an oak, though the tree becomes holy above others when it happens.

And high above, scuttling and leaping with a squirrel's grace, Kev stayed with them, glimpsed from time to time as a shadow against the sky.

They came to Pendor's cottage. At first, Felimid saw only a large thicket. Then he recognised it for a hedge of thorns, unruly, shapeless, enclosing a sort of garden. The thorns, edged as well as pointed, grew a foot long or more, like wooden daggers. A single arched gap led between them. Within lay a garden of herbs, vegetables and flowers, disorderly as the hedge, and a T-shaped cottage, walled with clay and thatched with rushes. Flat stones

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set in the earth made a path to the door.

Within, the house was cobwebbed and musty. Dust motes whirled in the glow of early day. Down the leg of the T ran shelves lined with bottles and jars containing dried leaves, seeds and roots, sticky ointments, elixirs and juices and what not. A long table was littered with bowls, spoons, rods, a pestle and mortar, a tiny bronze brazier shaped like an owl, a wooden board with a dead frog pinned on it, lumps of beeswax, knives, scrapers, graters, two stained tattered books, and a cluster of fresh mistletoe. At the far end, a cage of wooden bars lashed together with rope dangled from a beam. It was of a size to take a man. Lurching through the door on his crutch, Felimid saw it and stiffened. He was menacing Pendor's large belly with Cat's point that same instant. Bad foot and all.

'What is the use of that cage?' he demanded.

"Sudden you are,' observed Pendor, unflinching. 'The use of that cage is to hold captives, as any fool can see. This cottage is not far from the forest fringes, where lurk highwaymen in ones and twos, and outlaws in larger bands. They value my services, and so have not burned me out. They even trust me to some extent. Thus, when some among them take a prisoner for ransom, as occasionally happens, they leave him with me while they dicker for his release. I'm not apt to cut his throat in a fit of impatience, you see. So that his ransom is paid, I see him restored to his folk. This makes others more likely to pay in the future.' He shrugged. 'One does what one can. I make a certain profit, but a few men owe me their lives. Now lower your foolish weapon and let me see that foot.'

The bard spoke cadences through the throbbing in his head.

'Cages offend me,
And make me mistrustful;
Wizard, attend me
And mark what I say.
Regan is comely
And bandits are lustful.
You might deliver her
To them for pay.

'That were unkindly
And short-sighted trading.
Do not so blindly,
But think of your health.
Death as a pander
Were sad and degrading—
Live a herb-doctor,
And look not for wealth.'

'Uh!' he finished, unmusically, as Pendor jerked his ankle sharply. There was a clicking that Felimid felt in his bones rather than heard in his ears, and a lessening of pain after a few seconds. Pendor rubbed a dark, smelly slave into his foot and strapped it tightly. He promised the bard that he should be able to walk on it by the next day.

'Now you must eat.'

Pendor filled a little bronze cauldron with bones, rotting wood, mould and ordure. Stirring it over a charcoal fire while muttering chants in a language Felimid did not know, he transformed it into a savoury stew. By similar means he conjured up bread, fruit, cheese and some amazingly good ale. Felimid began to see why bandits and highwaymen took care to stay on good terms with the peculiar hermit. He believed he had better do the same, lest Pendor turn the food again to garbage in his belly. But Pendor busied himself attending to Regan before he fed.

The stew was delicious, but

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strange, and the bard tasted it with caution. The meat seemed to be lamb. The spices and vegetables were nothing he knew. Their flavour might hide anything, but at least it gave an excuse for asking; it would seem odd if he did not comment. No more than a tiny morsel had passed his lips as yet.

'Lamb? Yes,' Pendor said. 'But the rest is from worlds beyond this, or imagined wholly by me. The same elements are in offal as in the most tempting dishes. It's easy to juggle and combine them differently when one knows how.'

'When one knows how,' echoed Felimid. He felt no cramps, pains or dizziness that the food might have caused. Best wait longer, though, before eating more. 'It's always easy then, is it not? And can you make me wolf or hog in the same way, if you care to?'

'Perhaps,' Pendor said absently, rubbing thin oil with a sharp, aromatic whiff into Regan's back. 'This will ease her breathing—yes, I might effect such a change, but it would be a far greater exercise of power, and more trouble than it is worth unless I were much provoked. Let us both hope that I will not be. Living creatures are the source of magic; they also resist it most strongly when it does not agree with their desires or natures or beliefs. So you must not look for me to perform miracles of cure upon your woman.'

'She's hardly *my* woman. But will she recover?'

'I think it likely.' Pendor began rubbing Regan's chest as impersonally as he had her back. 'If she's not afflicted by some worse illness while this yet weakens her. By the sylvan powers little and great, what are you thinking of to travel in the Forest of Andred at this time of the year?'

'We were not given choice,' Felimid said wryly. 'I guessed at King Oisc's Yule feast in Kent. Regan was a slave in his dun, pining for her own language and ways. The malice of one of King Oisc's hearth companions, and the lies of his pet shaman, made him think me a Roman spy. It so happened that Regan and I made our escape from Kent together. The forest offered hiding. That is about the whole song of it.'

'Remarkable. Why, you are not eating.'

'Not from distaste. I've never had better, but my stomach's shrunken this past week.' But he'd seen Pendor drink ale. He did likewise, and gusted a sigh. 'You have my story, Master Pendor. What of yours? Why do you live in the forest and consort with thieves?'

'That is none of your concern, but I don't mind answering.' The hermit's ugly face corrugated in a scowl. 'It's a tale not unlike yours. Eight years gone I was town mediciner at Hamo's Port, and a credit to my calling, by the gods! King Natanleod ruled the land, but his Bishop ruled him, and made magic a burning matter. I was accused. I was condemned, more by my looks than by proof. In your own phrase, the forest offered hiding, and here I fled. I cursed the need at the time. By Demeter and Prosperpine, did I! Discomfort, upheaval, danger! But it was a blessing in disguise, for five years later the pirates of Vectis under Cerdic took the kingdom with fire and slaughter. And I was safely out of it. Natanleod died at Charford; his daughter wed Cerdic's son. And here I do bide.' He glanced at Regan. 'Sound asleep, and the better for it. Well, if you desire no food, I do.'

He filled a bowl with stew and

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began to eat. He munched slowly, steadily, without speaking, and the bard did not speak either while he was thus occupied. He plucked soft random notes on his harp, tasted dark red apple and yellow cheese, sipped the brown ale that gratified throat and stomach, and thought. Some of his thoughts were not for sharing, but when Pendor had finished his meal the bard voiced one.

'These robber friends of yours—'

"Yes?"

'Will I have to fight them?'

'No doubt you mean over the girl,' Pendor said. 'Of course you will. You may find it harder to win clear of the forest's edge than you did to cut your way through the ancient heart of it. In my home will be no such difficulty; I permit no ructions here, and you may leave when you wish. But expect no help from me beyond yon hedge of thorns. If certain acquaintances of mine—not friends, Titus!—make you their prisoner and decide to leave you in my keeping, then that is how it will be. Food, shelter and medicine I can give. Safe conduct I cannot.'

'I'd value it not much if you did. Surely less than your frankness.'

And thanks for speaking the false name I gave you. I'd half forgotten it. My head feels clogged with hot sand. If there must be trouble, I hope I need not meet it for a few days.

The gods granted his hope, or it came true without them. When a couple of importunate bandits came by, Pendor told them his guests were more direly ill than they seemed, and hinted at plague. Seldom can two thieves have run faster. The bard trusted him somewhat more after that, and was not overly concerned when Regan betrayed his true name in her fever; or not for himself. His slight sickness ran its course and departed. Regan recovered more slowly from her more severe attack, but in time she too was healthy again. Since the morning Pendor had found them, ten days had passed.

Then dawned the eleventh, and there was no more peace.

III

REGAN COULD HARDLY take her eyes from Pendor the wizard. Each time she looked away, she had to look back to be sure that a man could really be so improbably ugly. She knew she was staring, and she had been taught better manners, but she couldn't help it; and she could hardly gawk at the man all the time without speaking to him. She'd seem a half-wit. To her surprise, she found talking with him pleasant.

She had always been free with her confidences. He soon knew of her marriage to a wealthy farmer, her son's death in his first year, her husband's murder by raiding Jutes who burned the steading and drove off the stock, and the rest. It was not an exceptional story. Rome's empire was broken past mending in the west, and lawful dominion with it. Law had become what the nearest man with the strongest sword arm said it was.

Or the nearest magician with the strongest magic.

Pendor returned her confidence in some degree. He told her his own story as he'd told it to Felimid, and they agreed that times were bad and growing worse. Regan asked if he would perhaps leave the forest some day.

'I think not,' Pendor said. 'No. I'm as safe here as anywhere, and unlike your bard I can well endure to stay in one place. Besides, the robbers that abound in these parts would never let me take my departure. I have made

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myself too useful to them to murder offhand, and therefore too useful to lose. *Quod erat demonstrandun.*'

'You can fly above them in Basket if you so do wish!'

'No,' Pendor said again. 'Basket's power is drawn from the deep black earth. It cannot rise that high, nor travel that fast. I'd have more chance on a good horse! I wove Basket to bear heavy loads for me, not to fly through the air and win races with lark or wyvern.' He grinned, a reckless act that nearly severed his ears. 'Do you see me performing such exercises?'

Regan laughed and shook her head.

'What of yourself?' Pendor asked.

The laughter died. 'I scarce know. Felimid has been good to me, he's helping me reach a Christian kingdom where he has friends, but he has enemies there too, the king's heir among them. He plans to take me there in secret, and has warned me not to speak his name. Well, I'm strong, I can work. I can't be worse off than I was in King Oisc's dun.'

'You do not mean to wed him?'

'I'd as soon think of wedding the wind!'

A horn blew loud, peremptory and wrathful in the forest. Pendor's great bald head and Regan's small black-haired one turned simultaneously towards it. Pendor seized his rowan staff, Regan a broad-bladed knife. Both hastened outside.

Felimid stood there, frowning at the arch of thorns, Cat loose in his sheath. He said without turning, 'Do your forest bandits blow horns like that, Pendor?'

'Not like that.'

Then creatures came through the arch, numbering six, and Regan wanted very much to press herself against Pendor for comfort. Instead she made a soft mewing noise and gripped her knife the tighter. The wizard was a paragon of beauty and grace beside these.

They were manlike, which made it worse. They were taller than Felimid, but stoop-shouldered and loose-limbed, with hard gaunt muscles. Large were their hands, and large their feet. For hair they had crests of dark bristles that ran down to the bases of their spines. Their red eyes were cavernous under ridges of bone, they had big jutting snoutlike noses above repulsive harelips that showed long eyeteeth like tusks, and they snarled. They were kilted and sandalled in brown leather. Felimid thought they must be crossbred of man and goblin, but neither race would have cared to acknowledge them.

Pendor felt consternation that they had been able to enter his garden at all. The thorns should have woven implacably together to bar their way. Magic or a negation of magic worked for them.

Each was branded on the breast with a mark Felimid had not seen before. It might have been the symbol of some rite or fraternity, but he did not think so. They did not attack, though their manner left him in no doubt that they wanted to. They were like fierce dogs awaiting a word or restrained by one. This and the brands suggested that they were owned.

Their master rode under the arch of thorns, bending low over the neck of a black mare whose beauty was like a hand clenching the heart. Black, black and gleaming she was, with a mane and tail like two snowfalls, and fluently she moved. Felimid was disappointed in the rider. The mare was the nobler of the two.

Not that the rider lacked presence. He was broadly built and thicker-

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limbed than most men, but none of his movements were clumsy. He'd curly copper hair and a curly copper beard, a little pursed contemptuous mouth and such unwavering pale eyes that he seemed blind, but sadly he wasn't. His physical sight was keen as a hawk's.

He fixed his cruel empty stare on Felimid and snapped, 'You!'

'Is this recognition? Do you know me?'

'What?' The stranger seemed surprised that such a scarecrow object was able to question him. The scarecrow object wished he didn't have to confront this arrogance in tattered lousy garments that belonged on a midden. 'Hear me, thief! I am Lord Avraig the Hunter, and these are my dogs. Did you maliciously destroy a great spider in this region?'

'No,' Felimid said with utter truth.

'No?' Avraig's eyes glittered coldly. 'You crawling dung-beetle, will you lie to my face? My dogs have tracked you here from the site of your crime. They can follow a trail a year old that had been scoured by flood and fire in the meantime. You dare deny slaying the monster?'

'That isn't what I denied. I slew it surely, but not with malice. And that's what you asked.'

'I'm about to make an end of your word games,' the Lord Avraig told him. 'There is the forest; run as far as you can. This man who gave you shelter and this woman who shares your guilt I do mean to slay. This hovel I shall burn. It's poor compensation for the loss of my sport, but such as it is I will have it. Run!'

'How much you take for granted,' Felimid mused. 'Lord Avraig, hear *me*. I'm the gentlest, most patient and forbearing man I know, but I've had enough of men hunting me for no reasonable reason. Fight!'

The Lord Avraig danced his black mare disdainfully away, and motioned his half-human dogs forward. They drew large hunting knives as they came.

Felimid held his ancestor's blade. He had not been observed to draw. First Cat rested peacefully in his sheath, and then he burned blue and white in the singer's hand. His point slotted between discernible gaunt ribs, slid through a lung and split the heart beyond. He sprang free before the creature began to fall, bit off a hand that wielded a knife and then opened the throat above it.

Behind Felimid, Pendor shouted, 'Rope!'

Then he went to work with his rowan staff. He parried a ripping knife-stroke and thrust to the middle with his own longer, more versatile weapon. The half-man vomited black bile, and Pendor hoped he'd ruptured its liver or spleen. He gave it a mighty two-handed whack across the kidneys to put it out of the fight altogether.

Regan by then was desperate. She was a small person, and a kitchen knife has not the range of staff or sword. The half-men were far longer-limbed than she. One confronted her, grinning; it was a ghastly sight. She held her knife blade upward in her hand and retreated from him, aware that he'd slice her to collops if she let him near. A glance told her the men were both fighting well. They had accounted for three of these creatures between them. Let her hold this one's attention just a little longer and she might receive help. No, the Lord Avraig was joining the fight, anger at the need to so dirty his hands darkening his face. There would be no help, and her antagonist was pressing her

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back. She knew that she looked upon her death.

Pendor saw, pointed at her attacker with his staff, and yelled, 'Rope! Strangle that one!'

The creature closed with her, struck her knife-arm. She caught his knife-wrist, stabbed at his belly and was astounded to see her blade sink to the hilt, though not too astounded to twist it. The creature yowled and lunged for her throat. She got her arm between his fangs and their target, then screamed as they grated on bone. She couldn't hold back his knife more than a few heartbeats.

Something slithered across her body. *Snake?* No. She glimpsed a grey rope, thick as her wrist but silken-flexible, coiling about the half-man's neck. It tightened swiftly. He raised his knife to sever the thing, but another loop bound his arm immobile to his bleeding side. Regan tore free from him and watched his death-struggles with awe. Even the pain of her mangled forearm was forgotten for the moment.

Pendor had knocked another half-man sprawling with a bloody head. The Lord Avraig kicked his mare forward to ride him down, but the bridle-reins rotted abruptly, the saddle-girth with them, and the Lord Avraig crashed among the trampled snowdrops in Pendor's garden. He came smoothly to his feet, drew his sword and advanced upon the wizard. His tunic became rotting sackcloth as he moved. His legs were wrapped in filthy untanned hides. His cloak was a patchwork miscellany.

The bard laughed for joy. 'You've descended in the world!'

He quickly slew the half-man that faced him, and intercepted its master. The Lord Avraig attacked with frigid, harnessed fury glittering in his pale eyes. Felimid laughed again.

The black mare reared above Pendor, neighing. He rolled from under her stamping hooves and shouted for aid. 'Rope! Hobble me this horse!'

Rope unwound from the remnants of its former task and writhed to obey. Regan, moaning softly, let her savaged arm dangle while blood ran down and dripped from her fingertips. With her good hand she plucked the knife from the creature's belly and cut its throat. It appeared already dead, but there was no knowing. Rope might have been called away too soon.

The Lord Avraig was taller than he had looked in the saddle. He had Felimid's height and reach, he was broader and more massive though he quickly learned he was no stronger, and if he was also slower it was by an infinitesimal margin. Their weapons rang and clashed like angry voices. Both men were enraged; both meant to kill.

Cat shed crimson drops as he sought a way past the Lord Avraig's guard. Feint, sudden thrust, interposition of steel, and the Lord Avraig's hip leaked blood from a minor gash. It was nothing, not even a hindrance, but it cost him his temper, his control, and that was enough. He cut and hewed fiercely, then drove his point at Felimid's face.

Felimid beat the thrust aside. Cat slithered under the Lord Avraig's heavier blade, which hissed by Felimid's neck, and then Cat slipped through the muscles of Avraig's thick forearm as neatly as a shuttle through the threads of a loom, passing between the bones. The bard gave a slight twist, the Lord Avraig's face greyed, and his weapon fell from a hand robbed of strength. Then Felimid drove Cat fiercely through

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the middle of his chest.

The Lord Avraig fell blindly forward, clutching feebly at his killer, and spewed a great torrent of blood. Felimid made a noise of disgust, got a foot against the dead man's chest and shoved him backward off the impaling blade. There was no trace of regret in him such as he sometimes felt. The Lord Avraig had come here of his own free and arbitrary will to murder them all.

Had they been faint-hearted, he would have.

All their other enemies were slain, save only the black mare. She stood quiet, with Pendor's enchanted rope hobbling her legs. Pendor was attending to Regan's arm. When Felimid saw it, he cursed the dead by names it was not wise to utter. Regan smiled briefly.

'We beat them, did we not?' she murmured. 'And all of us live! I call that a fine day's work. But who was he, Felimid? At first I thought him the Devil incarnate, but he wasn't that or he'd not have died. Why, w-w-why did he wish to harm us?'

Her teeth began to chatter, and her face was whey-pale. Only Diancecht, lord of healing, knew how much of her arm's use could be restored. The bard answered to fill the silence.

'I can surmise. He named himself a hunter—'(He hadn't; he'd named himself *the* hunter.) '—and accused me of costing him sport. I reckon he'd marked the spider for his quarry and was angered because I dared slay it before him. He had power, I could feel it in him. But he was too arrogant to think that we might.'

'I'm glad you killed him,' Regan said.

'Inside with you,' Pendor declared, lifting her easily in his thick arms. 'I'll conjure strong wine and you shall drink away your pain. I'll mingle a sleeping draught in the eighth or ninth cup. What say you? Felimid, I must leave you to clear away the rubbish, I regret.'

'Why? They lie within the province of your powers now, if they didn't before! Turn them to manure and fertilize your garden with them!'

He spoke to the air. Pendor had entered his cottage and kicked the door shut behind him. Felimid shrugged. The wizard could hardly waste time on such unimportant detail when Regan needed his care. Nor might the corpses be left to lie. They would bring wolves. Scut work, but it had to be done.

He eyed the black mare. Gods, what a creature, what a steed, what a mount! He snapped his fingers. She could take him past the forest robbers with no difficulty. It must be so. The Forest of Andred was bounded on three sides by the kingdoms of the invading sea-wolves; Jutes to the north, Saxons to the south and more Jutes to the west, since the fall of Hamo's Port. Yet the Lord Avraig had entered it, riding the mare and companied by his half-human pack. And Felimid mac Fal would ride out!

'So, so, my beauty,' he sang, approaching the mare with no sudden motions. 'Do not shy. I wish only to take the bit from your mouth, it's useless now and must discomfort you. Easy, there! I'm gentle-handed. By the gods, a brutal thing is this! If he couldn't ride you without it, he didn't deserve to ride you at all. Why did you fight for him?'

'I had no choice,' replied the mare. 'He knew my name.'

'Cairbre!' breathed the bard.

'I am a daughter of Epona the horse-goddess,' the mare told him. 'The Lord Avraig discovered my name

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and thereby enslaved me. Hunting was his passion, his delight; I have carried him between worlds in the pursuit of it. No more! My gratitude is yours for killing him.'

'I'll not ask your name or try to learn it,' Felimid said. 'But will it offend you if I dare call you Myfanwy? The meaning of that is the Rare One.'

The mare nickered. 'It will suffice.'

'And I'd ask of you a favour, since it was I that slew the Lord Avraig.'

'Ask.'

'That you speak not in anybody's hearing but mine. That you feign lack of understanding and bide here a week or so, till the girl's arm be healed. We may need to depart suddenly, she and I. Will you bear us where we wish to go, before you leave us?'

'I will do these things,' Myfanwy agreed. 'You do not quite trust the ugly man.'

'Not quite, no. I may wrong him, but I'd as soon do that as judge him too kindly and then find that my trust was misplaced. If it comes to that, you were not wise to let me know who you are. Suppose I were a new Lord Avraig?'

'I suffered this feeble rope to learn. None, mortal man, *none* can master or hold me without knowing my true name, and the one who betrayed it to the hunter has long since been trampled by many hooves. Be content to call me Myfanwy.'

'So be it,' Felimid said. And busied himself dragging the dead into the forest. He didn't believe that Rope was as feeble as Myfanwy claimed. It had held her while he finished with the Lord Avraig. Well, if she exaggerated, he was not inclined to think less of her for it; he now and then resorted to exaggeration himself. It was perhaps true that nobody could master her save by the power of her name. But other means could hold her against her will for a time.

IV

REGAN SLEPT with soft purring snores, fumes of wine on her breath. Her forearm was thickly bandaged. Pendor nodded his large head at her.

'Poor lass,' he said. 'She's having a bad time of it these days.'

'It would have been worse if not for your living rope,' Felimid replied. 'I've been your guest for near a fortnight, and you said not a word of it. Why?'

'Now don't be foolish. It never arose. Besides, if I kept no secrets from my friends, I'd have none left for my foes. And Rope does not live, though it seems to. Wine?'

'Not at this moment. By Cairbre's fingers! I'd give much to bathe in the Roman way! Or in any way at all!'

'My well and bucket are in the garden. I think you are enough recovered from your illness to take no harm from water. Here!'

He tossed the bard an object that Felimid took at first for a lump of cheese or wax. His nose told him that in truth it was soap. He'd never touched finer. It did not amaze him when he thought upon it. Soap was probably no harder to conjure up than stew or wine. He stripped himself naked and wrapped a rough brown blanket about him for use as a towel.

'Master Pendor,' he said, 'I'd as soon not don these bloody stinking tatters again. Can you perhaps improve 'em?'

Refusal was on Pendor's tongue. He did not wish Felimid, or anybody, to learn the precise extent, and limitations, and nature, of his powers. He'd conjured ale, wine, stew, soap, cheese—well, what of it? These were

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simple substances that any farmwife could prepare without magic, if more crudely, all save the wine. Useful sorceries, but hardly aweful. His robber acquaintances and Regan took them for granted, without looking beyond. But they hadn't bardic training in degrees and categories of thought.

If he denied that he could grant Felimid his asking, Felimid would know that he lied and was bound to wonder why. In truth, he was trapped. Let him refuse, and Felimid was bound to guess his reasons. Let him accede, and Felimid was sure to wonder about what else he could do, and arrive at that. He'd just such a mind, a curiosity that roved at random, with sharp wits to serve it. A pity. He'd become a danger.

Therefore—

'Yes, I believe so,' Pendor said. 'I should have done it before.'

Felimid strode out, humming, the sword Cat and the harp Golden Singer accompanying him, as always. They were never more than arm's length from him. Had he left them for once, Pendor could simply have muttered a word to Rope. Not now. That dazzling sword could cut Rope in futle foot-long pieces. A subtler ploy was demanded.

The bard was not thinking of treachery. Washing in cold water was no novelty to him, though in Britain he'd learned to appreciate such effete Roman luxuries as were still to be had. He sloshed a bucket or two over himself, soaped, sloshed again, hacked off his ginger beard with a razor from his pouch, and returned blanket-wrapped to the cottage feeling far better. New garb awaited him.

He felt unbelievingly of clothes an elf might have worn. There was a shirt of heavy linen with blue and dark brown checkering, leaf-green trousers and long cloak, both of unborn lamb's wool, tunic of soft moss-green leather, buskins, belt, wallet and cap of the same, no visible seam or stitch among all. The buckles and such were smooth grey bone. He found phrases of gratitude that smoothly rhymed and scanned; they came naturally to his lips. But some vague uncertainty was filling his brain with cold fogs of apprehension in which ugly but undefined shapes prowled. He wished he knew!

His back felt as if a target were painted on it in bright pigments, the mark centered neatly between his shoulder-blades, and men with javelins were making bets on their skill.

It was a feeling he had learned to respect.

Pendor filled his cup with yellow wine. Felimid watched him drink, then poured for himself. The wine stung his mouth like pale cool fire. Why, Pendor could make his living in a score of ways if he chose; brewer, tailor, physician, cook, what-have you. He—

Felimid's senses dissolved. His head was suddenly full of echoes and distance. He lurched spastically to his feet, groping for the edge of the table, but his fingers missed, gone clumsy and boneless. He fell untidily to the floor. Pendor stared at him bleakly, and felt no triumph.

He'd drunk of the yellow wine in Felimid's sight to make him feel safe. From childhood had Pendor taken doses of certain drugs and poisons, infinitesimal at first but larger by turns, so that now he was immune to venoms that might destroy a hundred ordinary men. The full contents of the jug would not have made his head ache. Not that Felimid's one relishing swallow would kill him. The paralysis would pass, if he lived, which he

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must not.

Pendor brooded, and poured himself more of the treacherous liquor. What to tell Regan? Perhaps that Felimid, bored, had gone hunting and not returned. There was enough danger in the Forest of Andred to make such a yarn believable. Regan would weep for him, and for her own hopes, but she would accomodate herself to fact. She would have to. She'd be welcome to share his house, but that was a dream. Not a rogue in the forest would not set aside expediency, foresight and caution at the glimpse of a woman. The bard had been altogether right about that. Pendor could not with safety keep her, and he regarded nothing higher than his own safety. The robbers must have her. They would of course then fight each other for her till some snarling dog-in-the-manger cut her throat. Sad, but needful.

'Basket!' Pendor cried.

The night-black mare who restlessly waited outside, heard him. She saw Basket emerge from the cottage with the man Felimid for a burden. She heard Pendor instruct his creation to take the man into the forest and leave him with the corpses of the Lord Avraig and his pack. She saw Basket go, moving a yard above the ground like a drifting boat on a placid stream. The bard had been right to mistrust the wizard, and wrong to think vigilance was enough. She fretted at the rope tangling her feet.

Pendor glanced at her. She threw up her lovely head, whinnying, to avoid meeting his eyes. If he knew she was more than a mute beast, if he suspected it even now, she might have traded her old bondage for new. But nay. She sensed he was but admiring her, and had much on his mind to keep him from looking too closely. He magicked a bundle of hay from his compost heap for her, and went inside rubbing his hands. An enchanted harp! A sword of wonder and might! A magnificent horse! A woman! This had been a profitable day!

The mare began fighting to escape Rope's tenacious hold.

Basket moved unconsciously to the directions it had been given. Rather, the wizard's mind directed it, and words uttered aloud had helped make his thoughts clear and forceful. Basket itself had neither mind nor senses. But there was one who had, and could be curious too.

Kev moved, interested, high in the trees.

He kept effortless pace with Basket. He'd often seen the strange object following the thick man who left food for him, or moving by itself. He'd seen it bear the man who had fought the spider, when he was hurt. Was he now hurt again? He lay very still. Perhaps he was dead. Kev hoped not. He hoped the man would live, and make more of the sounds that had drawn him to listen from the trees this past week, not understanding but liking. They had been good sounds. They had echoed all the things he knew and presaged things he had never known. That it was now too late for him to know. They had hurt, in a way, and yet they had given him something—new.

He watched.

The ravens were first at the banquet, but the wolves would not be far behind. A whirring black storm went upward as Basket appeared. It lifted like a boat that catches a sudden wave side-on, dumping Felimid with the rest of the ravens' meat, and returned the way it had come. Kev, in the brief silence, distinctly heard the

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bard make a sound. Alive. The stranger was alive.

Kev broke small branches from his perch and flung them accurately at the birds. When they became used to this and ignored it, Kev descended to drive them off by waving his arms. He caught one that was too slow, and bit off its head. The rest kept their distance after that.

Felimid fought unsuccessfully to move. He could only make inarticulate sounds, roll and blink his eyes. He felt as though the blood had congealed in all his veins. The helplessness was more dreadful than being bound, for one could at least try to wriggle free from bonds. He'd done so in the past. He shed tears of rage and wished for Pendor's neck between his hands.

Would the effect of this accursed poison pass? It might, but it was like to take some hours. He didn't suppose he had so long before wolves or a sounder of savage pigs discovered him. Kev wouldn't stay to defend in the face of such terrors, and he'd be no help if he foolishly did. He could only die. Felimid struggled again with muscles inert as clay. He failed again to stir hand or foot.

The voice of Myfanwy was like soft silver chimes with a hidden tone of bronze. The bard would have loved it then if it had been like grinding shingle. It spoke from behind him.

'Do you live, mortal man?'

He gurgled, Kev climbed swiftly beyond her reach. She looked up at him with eyes like wet black gems.

'Come down,' she said. 'I mean you no harm. This man you were protecting needs your help as well as mine. You must lift him to my back and hold him there. Come down, come down!'

Felimid managed to croak with a tongue like a sponge full of water, 'Kev.'

Myfanway's ears twitched. 'What? Was that a word?'

The bard bent great effort toward achieving clarity. One short name, that was all! Spoken with lips and tongue that wobbled imbecilically loose and would not be governed. Again!

'*Kev.*'

He stared intensely at the feral boy while he said it.

'The boy?' Myfanwy asked. 'Is this his name?'

Felimid tried to say it a third time, but that was the poorest attempt of all. It tangled in his throat and came out a grunt.

'Kev,' Myfanwy said like music. 'Kev, brave one, lost one, come down and help us now or we too are lost. You have done well. Now you must do better or what went before will be for nothing! Kev, you have neither speech nor companionship nor much of understanding, but you have a treasure that all value lightly save those who lack it. You have hands. I need those hands. Come down and lend me the use of them . . .'

The name gives power. Felimid had done his best to hide his from Pendor. The daughter of Epona had been bound by hers to serve the Lord Avraig. Kev's name had been given him casually, but nonetheless by a wizard who was not inept in such matters, and it had affinities with him. By that name and the beauty of her voice, Myfanwy coaxed him to stand before her at last. It was longer before he saw what she wanted of him.

She took Felimid's cloak and tunic in her teeth, lifted him to his feet like a sack of grain, like a limp and dangling puppet. She did this several times

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before Kev caught the notion of pushing one of the bard's legs over her back. He tumbled off twice on the far side before Kev caught the further notion of holding him to prevent this, by which time the bard's bruises were extensive, his neck unbroken by the beneficence of his gods, and his fine new raiment in almost as foul a state as his old. It was perhaps well that he was mute as Kev for the nonce.

They were far from the husk of Myfanwy's former master, and the Sun was westering, when the bard regained movement and speech.

'By the deep dark womb of Mother Danu!' He said. He was moved, and had been much afraid, or he'd never have sworn so. Earth Mother was not a power to invoke too freely. 'The birds had eaten my eyes but for you, Kev. The wolves had gorged on the rest of me but for you, Myfanwy. I had lain yet among the dead but for both of you.'

'A favour for a favour,' the mare replied. 'Pardon me my late coming. The wizard's rope was like a quicksand. You were right to misdoubt him, but it did not seem to guard you. What happend in his cottage?'

'He was cunning. He gave me some poison or drug to which he's inured, in wine. He drank of it himself to lull me. The fault is with me that he did. By the gods! He's ugly within as much as without, that one.'

'But why? Does he lust for the woman who fought with you?'

'I haven't thought on it a great deal yet. I've certain inklings, but let them wait. I'll hammer them out tonight and give you my guesses when they are clear in my own head. I don't care to call Pendor to his just accounting in the dark, while Rope slithers about at his beck. He's wasted as apothecary, herb-doctor and wizard. He truly is. He'd make some lord a remarkable fine hangman.'

v

A RANDOM WIND shifted through the endless cathedral dim of the forest. It slid fingers through Myfanwy's mane and tail, making them flow like molten silver. She had been listening to the bard for some time. Now she nodded, a poor abrupt word for what she did with her lovely head. Of all mortal creatures not the horse, not the deer, not even the cat, approaches the grace that was hers. She was surely first cousin to the unicorn.

'You observe sharply and think shrewdly,' she said. 'I believe you have the rights of it. Then Pendor acted from fear and not from lust or greed.'

'As I think.' Felimid looked savage. 'I'm not inclined on that account to pardon him.'

'Then what will you do?'

'My first thought was to make his fears come true. I'd still like it. Justice, vengeance and a good story to tell, from the one deed. But there is Regan. That arm of hers is apt to fester, turn bad, without Pendor's leechcraft. She may die. And also, there is Kev.' The feral boy's ears cocked forward like a beast's at his name. 'Pendor has been a benefactor of sorts to him. I would take away nothing that makes his life even a little better. It's my eyes and probably my life that I'm owing him. So Myfanwy, Rare One, I'll stay out of sight and do nothing. For now.'

The mare nuzzled his cheek, an exceptional gesture from her to mortal man. 'You, too, are somewhat rare,' she said.

The wizard had other eyes than Kev's in the forest. The three of them

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together were able to evade these, but they could not gag the wind or hinder its passing. The chance must be taken that Pendor would not sift its murmurings for news for some days. He could no more compel its service than they could—his powers were of a different sort—and he had much else to do.

Felimid went into hiding, near the place where he had killed the spider. It was the most shunned and loathy part of the forest, and remained so even now with the spider gone. The horror had been unique, Myfanwy said; he need not fear others. It had been the last survivor of its kind, so nearly immune to time that it had seen men come into Britain, and might have seen them vanish if it had been spared. That was why the Lord Avraig had so desired to hunt it, and why he had been so enraged to find it newly slain.

More than once Myfanwy let herself be glimpsed and hunted, though none came near her. More than once she listened to robbers' councils and brags in the night. Often she watched Pendor's cottage. Felimid also did these things, but for the most part he let Myfanwy be his eyes and ears. It did no harm if she was known to live yet. It must not even be suspected of him.

Word of the woman at Pendor's cottage had quickly got around. He had offered her to the man or men who captured the black mare, which most of the robbers thought fair enough. She'd have to stay with the wizard while her arm mended in any case. And no matter who got the woman initially, it would be subject to change with spears and axes.

Felimid grinned when he heard that. They were counting their chickens before the eggshells broke if anybody ever had. Pendor had told Regan nothing of this offer; he was all friendship and assurance to her face.

Said Felimid, 'And she and I both had the poor judgment to like him.'

He had no weapons bar his razor, which was a bad way to be in the Forest of Andred. The harp Golden Singer and the sword Cat were as much in his mind as Regan; he wanted them all. But he knew when and how he would take them back, and the time was not yet. He gained a few days' meat when Myfanwy slew a boar with her hooves. He was impressed, and very glad those hooves had been hobbled at a time when they might have been used against him.

The meat he shared with Kev. The boy was much in his company those days of waiting, though never would he come within arm's reach.

Felimid spent many hours teaching him words. Pendor had tried and failed, but Pendor was not descended direct from Ogma, nicknamed in his day Cermait, which means the honey-mouthed. He'd been the greatest poet of the Tuatha de Danann, and devised the alphabet of potent symbols that bore his name. He'd been immortal, the lord of language and writing, of meaning itself. He'd been a god. His remote descendant in this age was most mortal, but a hot bright spark from the fire of Ogma's power remained to him. Language was his gift. He was fluent in a dozen Erse, British and German tongues, grasping the rhythm and structure of each new one quickly, garnering in short time a wide harvest of words. Thus he did not make labour of teaching the boy, but love.

He didn't deceive himself that Kev would ever think and speak as other men. If nothing else forbade it, he

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wasn't like to survive that long. No bigger than eleven, he might well be fifteen and had but little chance of reaching twenty. If with his stunted mind he learned to pronounce a few simple words with meaning, and not repeat them at random, it would be an accomplishment. But Felimid felt bound to try. In a week he had given Kev five words and a grasp of their application, and taught him not to confuse them. They were *eat, hurt, man, beast,* and his own name, *Kev.* The last had been simplest of all to convey, as it referred to him and to nothing else. Kev had no use for profundities. It was not much, but it was more than he'd had and as much as he could use.

And then it was time.

Felimid had fashioned a tough oak staff for a weapon. With that, with Kev and Myfanwy, he returned in secret to Pendor's cottage by no marked path. The three of them bided and watched for a while. All was quiet, and Felimid began to wonder, was this unpreparedness, or was it a trap? The obvious thing to do was to send Kev to learn. The wizard would not be surprised to see him. But Felimid's better feelings said no. Kev's wariness was like that of a beast. He hadn't enough of human thought to dissemble, or to know how and why Pendor might suddenly turn against him. Let Kev speak a word of his new vocabulary, and Pendor would guess at once who had taught him, who alone could have taught him. Then it would be poison or strangulation upon the instant for the lad. If he'd been able to know the risk, Felimid would have asked it of him. But using his ignorance to draw the lightning was an ill thing.

Besides, the bard thought wryly, *he might cost us our advantage of surprise.*

Bending forward, he whispered in Myfanwy's ear, 'Are you willing to enter that garden again, Rare One?'

'Yes,' she made brief reply.

'Then go quickly!'

The single gap in the high thick hedge of daggerish thorns began to close. Crooked limbs clutched at them as they went through, dragging them back, tearing their flesh. Felimid struck hard with his staff, Myfanwy with her hooves. Thorns broke; skin tore. Then they had entered and were free.

Myfanwy smote the heavy cottage door with both forefeet. It split from top to bottom and fell thumpingly inward. The bard slid from Myfanwy's back and went through the doorway like a hungry ferret.

Pendor saw him with goggling eyes. Regan was not there.

The wizard recovered, and seized his rowan staff in both hands. Felimid's clothes became again what they had been; torn stinking wadmal and fur, walrus-hide boots, one slit to the toe, and a cloak tattered past belief. He laughed.

'Pitiful!' said he.

The Lord Avraig had not been stopped by the trick, and he had not seen it before. If Pendor was able to do more or worse, he'd have done it already, for his guilt and his broken door must inform him that Felimid did not come in friendship. The bard was on him, feinting and striking with his staff, moving like quicksilver, grinning coldly. Pendor willed the oak to weaken, to rot, to break apart. He parried.

His own rowan staff shattered ignobly in his hands. Felimid knocked him sprawling before he could open his mouth for Rope, knelt astride his chest and rammed wood hard against

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his larynx so that Pendor turned a most interesting shade of maroon.

'Oak,' he said softly. 'Oak scarred by mistletoe and untouched by iron. You couldn't destroy it, Pendor. You rotted your own staff as you corrupted your powers. *Where is Regan?*'

She answered his question herself, by returning from the well with a jug of water in her good hand. He told her briefly what had happened. She wanted to embrace him, but did not try; not after she knew what Pendor had done, and how necessary it was to hold him mute. She advised Felimid to kill him.

'I'd like that,' Felimid said. He stared grimly into Pendor's congested face. He remembered the horror of lying helpless while crows sought his eyes. 'Yes, I think it's the right way. Where are Golden Singer and Cat? Do you know?'

She shook her head. 'He told me you had gone into the forest and not come back. Had I seen harp or sword I'd have known that he lied. You never take a step without 'em.'

'Where are they hid?' he demanded of Pendor. 'Speak slowly, for if you even look as if you might say "Rope!" you will never speak again.'

He relaxed the crushing pressure of the staff across Pendor's windpipe by a munificent half inch. The wizard coughed rackingly.

'If I tell—I live?' he wheezed. 'Your oath as a bard?'

Felimid snarled and rammed the staff hard under Pendor's chin. The wizard fought with all his impressive strength, but was made to capitulate. Words came distantly through the sea-roar in his ears.

'That's for trying to bargain! You have one foot in the grave and the other foot slipping, don't you know that? I'll grind your throat soft as dough until nothing comes out of it but blood! Where is Golden Singer? Where is Cat?'

'Kill me, then!' Pendor defied him. It was a croaking whisper. 'You will never find what you seek!'

'We might put a candle under his toes,' Regan suggested. 'Or there are things I used to hear the pirates brag about at King Oisc's dun. Ways they had of wringing hidden treasure from honest folk.'

'We haven't time.'

'Felimid! I think you mean that you haven't the stomach.'

'Well—have you?'

'This—thing—tried to murder you. He'd give me to men as bad as those I've escaped from! Yes, I have the stomach, Felimid.. Give him to me. He will gabble of things that are nothing to do with him.'

Felimid allowed Pendor to speak a third time. Golden Singer and Cat were at his side within the minute.

'Coward,' Regan said contemptuously. 'You love your skin, don't you?'

'I'd have told secrets too,' Felimid remarked.

He gagged Pendor cunningly and bound him with Rope. Which was nothing but rope if Pendor did not command it. Then he shut the wizard in his own wooden cage.

'That will suffice,' he said. 'He must work the gag out of his mouth before he can bid Rope release him, and even then he must escape the cage. I suppose he can do that easily, but by then we will be gone. He promised you to the man who can ride Myfanwy. Well, and I've ridden her. He cannot say his conditions were not met.'

'I'd fire the cottage about him!'

'It's a notion with much of justice and virtue,' the bard agreed. 'But I've never been a just or virtuous man. I'll

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not even force him to restore my clothes again ere I leave. I have become the least bit, um, disenchanted with his gifts.'

Regan did not understand that. She had never seen Felimid in the brief finery Pendor had given him. She did not ask what he meant, sensing that it was unimportant. She wanted only to go far and far from this place. Felimid too had no other desires at the moment.

He knew better than to suggest a saddle to Myfanwy, even had there been one. The two humans mounted, Regan clasping Felimid's waist with her sound arm. (The other was healing well, but would be strengthless for some time yet.)

Felimid cut a way through the stubborn, living thorns that writhed at them. Limbs fell as fast as they groped forth. At last there were only stubs that twitched vainly, and the three left Pendor's garden with no new scars. But Felimid sighed with relief too soon.

Men emerged silently from the brush where they had lain. They numbered three, they were armed with spear, axe and club, and they barred his access to the winding deer path that led way from the cottage. He looked beyond them and saw nothing in the gloom, but he knew there must be more, immobile either side of the tail and poised in the trees. They were more ragged and richly endowed with vermin than he, for a marvel. And they were too many to fight. Not even Myfanwy's aid was enough.

How long before the wizard set himself free?

'The woman and the horse,' the leader demanded through his thicket of beard. 'Give them to us and you may go your way. Else—'

He made a throat-cutting gesture.

As one, Felimid and Regan said, 'No.'

The bandit's henchman best positioned for it hurled a spear without more debate. Felimid tossed Cat from left hand to right even as he saw the robber's arm go back. The spear flew. Myfanwy danced aside a little; Felimid plucked the hurtling weapon from the air, lightly reversed it in his hand, and flung it accurately back. The robber was pinned through his shoulder to the tree behind him. And Cat had returned to the bard's left hand before his foes had grasped the happening.

'Now let's talk,' Felimid advised. 'I can make you rich.'

The bandit leader was first to recover, as a leader should be. He guffawed loudly. He was not angered by the fate of his henchman; the fool had got what he deserved. He might have slain the mare or the woman. But this talk of making him rich, from a fellow bandit who had obviously nothing in the world but what was with him—that was to laugh at!

'Well, not I myself,' the stranger amended. 'I can tell you how Pendor the wizard can make you rich.'

'Him?' This was even more asinine. The man was talking, awaiting his chance to bolt for the woods. Best let him do that. The lads would drag him down without more losses when he tried. Yes, let him talk, and let him believe it's to a dolt, for now.

'Him?' the bandit chief repeated. 'If he can make anybody rich, why is he not rich himself? Why's he brewing remedies for the likes of us, in a cottage with mud walls?'

'He doesn't care for the risks of wealth he can't defend, that's why,' Felimid answered. 'Suppose his house were pillared with gold and floored

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with chalcedony. You'd have plundered it long since and fed him to the crows. Now wouldn't you?'

The bandit's eyes narrowed. 'You have begun to take my interest.' The wounded man had been freed of his own skewering spear and groaned on the wet ground. His chief yelled, 'None of you fight unless this dog tries to pass you!'

'Dog, is it?'

'And dog meat, if I catch you in a lie. Talk for your life, dog. The wizard can turn any thief or attacker into a toad. Why should he fear to seem wealthy?'

'Is that what he told you? He made more restrained claims to me, and still he lied. His powers are not of that sort. I'd be a toad this minute if they were. I've bound him, gagged him and shut him in his own cage. And what do you think of that?'

'I think,' the bandit said, 'that I've had enough of you.'

'Call him!' challenged Felimid. 'Ask him to come out and give me the lie!'

The bandit did this thing, to no result.

'He had wizardry, but its bounds are sharp,' Felimid said. 'Ive seen him decay leather harness to make a man fall from his horse. I've seen him turn rags to decent clothes, and the other way about. I've seen him conjure stew out of offal. And yet it was I who had to protect him from one angry man with a sword! Have you been blind and deaf all these years, to let him fool you? He has no power, no direct power, upon living creatures, or upon things that have never lived, like stone or metal. *His magic extends but to things that lived once, but no longer!* Bone, linen, leather, ash, wood, all such. These he can juggle, and transmute, and remake, as he pleases. Maybe it isn't even magic! Maybe the gods gave him the gift at birth, to pay him for his ugliness. It's a good gift. It means he need never go hungry, nor lack for liquor and warm clothing to his back. But it's little help against knife or sword in the hand of a determined man.'

The bandit chief pondered this. 'It agrees wi' things I've seen him do,' he conceded at last. 'Aye, and wi' things I've never seen him do. Yes. But what of it? A pot of stew here, a length of wool there! Are they the riches you promised me?'

He was fiercely eager now, a fish hooked on a string of persuasive words. He wanted so much to believe that one might now take liberties with him.

'You're dull,' Felimid told him. 'You're so stupid you make me tired. No wonder he chose to live among you!' He nearly spat his next words. 'Silk. Amber. Jet. Ivory. Pearl. Rich rare furs. Does it begin to penetrate the tiny node of gristle you do seriously call your brain?'

The outlaw gaped. He hardly heard Felimid's insults in his rapture at the pictures of staggering wealth he painted. Why, the wizard had been cheating him for years! All of them! And he lay bound within, fit for persuasion to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's!

'Is this true?' he demanded hoarsely. 'All that you've said, it's true?'

'My oath as a bard,' Felimid said. He felt enormously glad that he'd let Pendor live. He couldn't swear falsely in that particular manner. And if this revelation did not serve to distract the robbers while better folk escaped, there was none that would.

Or perhaps one.

He whispered to Myfanwy, 'Let them know you are impatient to be gone.'

The black mare neighed like a

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trumpet call. 'Make way, you scavenging pickers of bones!' she screamed. 'Way for a daughter of Epona!'

She knocked the bandit chief aside with her shoulder in passing. She flashed like an arrow between two henchmen of his who collided and grappled with each other instead of dragging down Regan. A third misjudged Myfanwy's swiftness as he dropped from a tree, landed in the trail a yard behind her and was clipped in the head by a flying back hoof. That was the end of him. A fourth, who had also been posted in ambush in a tree, was trying his utmost to pry Kev's teeth from his throat before they met. In trying, he lost his balance and fell. Kev released him at once, caught a limb with a squirrel's agility, and fled after his friends. The last of the robbers put himself directly in their path and swung an axe at Myfanwy's head. Felimid struck the blow aside. It would have splintered another sword than Cat, and it rattled Felimid's bones to the base of his spine. Then the black mare trod the robber down shrieking, and there were no more. They vanished in obscurity and distance.

The bandit leader had regained his feet. 'Let them go!' he bawled. It was a redundant saying, for they had gone. 'There's wealth waiting, you fools! We will all be kings!'

Those few of his henchman who were left followed him into Pendor's garden through the arch of thorns made harmless by Felimid's pruning. They were shaken, but their greed was most active. They were unlucky. The wizard was again free, had been for some little time, and had spent it planning a reception for these rowdy guests. They did not surprise him as Felimid had.

They quickly found that while the bard had not precisely lied, he had misled them. Pendor's powers were not as useless against direct attack as they had come to believe. His measures against the Lord Avraig and Felimid mac Fal had been ineffectual, because neither had granted him time for aught but the simplest magic. In sorcery as in all things, to make or transform is far more demanding than merely to unmake. But while the bandits argued and chaffered outside his door, he had gathered the concentration and discipline to welcome them as they deserved.

Rope summarily hanged the leader from a beam. The rest had their garments become hair-shirts and breeches of dried, threshed and woven nettles on their bodies, while their turds turned to blister-poultices inside them. As they blundered about they came within reach of the untrimmed parts of the thorn hedge, and there was a great deal of screaming. And thereafter silence.

Pendor, considering at his leisure, made up his mind at last that it was time he tried to better his fortunes, in some other place.

VI

REGAN looked north, and the view was wide. Hill and plain were darkened by occasional copses only, and heavy rain had fattened the rivers. Save isolated steadings, the sea-wolves had not settled here, and these no longer increased in number. Indeed, most had lately been burned by resurgent Britons inspired by Badon. They would win through.

'We did it,' she whispered. 'Mother of God, Sanctified Virgin, we did it! We came through the Forest of Andred from east to west! Let me have grandchildren and I'll tell them of this!'

The bard stroked Myfanwy's silken

(cont. on page 130)

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fantasy books

Reviewed by Fritz Leiber

SUPERNATURAL CATS, Edited by Claire Necker, Doubleday, 1972, $6.95

There are so many weird cat stories in this anthology (almost 50) that it's surprising only four overlap Michel Parry's *Beware of the Cat* (FANTASTIC, July 1973): Lovecraft's "The Cats of Ulthar," Le Fanu's "The White Cat of Drumgunniol," Benet's "The King of the Cats," and Saki's "Tobermory."

Sign of the times: Science-Fiction Cats (adequately supernatural by virtue of their strange powers) lead off the book with Cordwainer Smith's inimitable "The Game of Rat and Dragon," James White's intelligence-tormented Felix in "The Conspirators," my own high-IQ Gummitch in "Space-Time for Springers," Cleve Cartmill's brilliantly laconic "The Green Cat," and a Venusian adventure of Ruthven Todd's Flyball in "Space Cat."

Cat Metamorphoses include "Smith" by Ann Chadwick, about a cynical cat who wrote soppy best sellers, and the anthologist's own short-short, "Release from Life," which has a wonderful last line.

Talking Cats, besides Tobermory and the King, feature two more sophisticates, one who gives tips on stocks; the other, Chesterfieldian advice to his human son (Henry Slesar's "My Father, The Cat").

Psychic Cats comprise Gerald Heard's coolly and neatly startling "The Cat, 'I Am,'" Algernon Blackwood's moving and shivery "The Attic," and Walter de la Mare's beautifully etched "Broomsticks." The latter two stories are outstanding for their acutely accurate descriptions and detailed observations of actual cat behavior—they ring very true.

In the Unholy Cats section I was delighted to run into "Compliments of the Author," just about the most entertaining novella *Unknown* ever published—Henry Kuttner at his wittiest and most inventive. Also *The Yellow Cat* by Elinor Mordaunt—*Limehouse Nights* atmosphere. While Avenging Cats delights us with "The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral"—M.R. James at his underplayed Victorian best. Then there are Nightmare Cats, Grateful Cats, Cat Ghosts and Reincarnations, and a final section that might be called Undefinable Cats and which includes Spenser Holst's super-wacky "The Language of Cats," the ultimate story for Siamese fanciers. I can't think of anything really good the anthologist missed, except for a story or two from Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The Cat Cradle Book*, and those may not have been available.

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FROM THE HELLS BENEATH THE HELLS, by Robert E. Howard, as read by Ugo Toppo. Alternate World Recordings. 1975.

Howard wrote melodrama that always had a note of boyish bravado to it, even when he dealt with death and disillusion and the evil that lurks in the hearts of men, but his best work has, as Damon Knight has said, "a vividness, a color, a dream-dust sparkle" which more mature artists seldom catch.

Here we have the terse Kull story, "The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune," and the even more succinct "The Curse of the Golden Skull," tale of a wizard slain by Kull, and two poems: "Altars and Jesters—an Opium Dream," a phantasmagoria in the direction of George Sterling's "A Wine of Wizardry," and the more impressive "The Song of the Mad Minstrel"—who might well be the crazed and rebellious young poet Rinaldo, who perished in an attempt on King Conan's life—a figure suggestive of Howard's self.

Ugo Toppo reads the stories in arresting fashion with a youthful excitement and conviction like Howard's own, but with a diction so clear that the thoughtfully provided texts are hardly necessary. Alternate World Recordings is to be congratulated on picking for its first venture such an excellent dramatic artist, acclaimed for his readings of Bierce, London, and Poe, and for planning further offerings by writers well qualified to read their own stories, such as Robert Bloch and Harlan Ellison. A barbarian swordsman in gray by Jeff Jones enhances the album. [*Fritz is too modest to mention his own album,* Gonna Roll the Bones, *on the same label.*—TW]

THE PERSONAL EYE, by Clarence John Laughlin, Aperture, 1973, $8.50 soft cover, $12 hardcover, 101 photographs, mostly full-page.

Clarence Laughlin has always struck me as knowing more about fantasy than any person I've ever met. He's collected and then had to sell more than one big library of it. He was the first to call to my attention such marvels as the Watts Tower, Jorge Luis Borges, the Bradbury Building in Los Angeles, the glass-fronted cemetery boxes of Louisiana folk art, the erotic drawings of Fuseli, Ruthven Todd's *Footprints in the Snow*, etc.

His occupation is hunting down the fantastic with a camera, especially inside and out old buildings and cemeteries. And he always scrupulously adheres to what I like to think of as the rules of this sport: You don't disturb or tamper with any of the "realities" which you discover; if you do use double exposure or composite prints, or dress in the scene with figures, you tell the viewer so.

The results are such enchanting and often intensely spooky photographs as "The House of the Past," where pliofilm becomes a ghost in a wicker rocking chair, "A Vision of Dead Desire," in which marble Victorians in a glass-windowed mausoleum in Buffalo enact the wistful resolution of a family tragedy, "The Eye That Never Sleeps," a delightful satire on Puritanism, "The Enigma," comprising the tremendous tree-sprouting columns of ruined Windsor Plantation, "Iron Cases for the Dead" (cast-iron New Orleans coffins with an oval iron plate which could be swiveled aside to reveal, through a glass window, the face of the deceased), "And Tell of Time" (a moldering octagonal wall-clock in an abandoned bayou house which has had a bird's nest built in it, then been cobwebbed by spiders), etc.

We get a generous sampling of the chief categories into which Laughlin

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has divided his photographs: Glass Magic, Fantasy in Old New Orleans, Images of the Lost, Poems of the Inner World, the Louisiana Plantations, American Victorian Architecture, Fantasy in Europe, etc.

There are also a fine index of pictures and captions, three little prose sketches from Lafcadio Hearn's *Fantastics*, a lively introduction by Jonathan Williams in which he describes Laughlin as "the Master of Ignored Ghastliness, the Eldritch, the Psychopompous, the Metamorphic, the Mephitic, the Fearsome, and now and then of Trumpery and the Fulsome," (a photographic Gaham Wilson, in part) and some statements by the photographer himself, such as "The mystery of time, the magic of light, the enigma of reality . . . are my constant preoccupations . . . . the unreality of the 'real' and the reality of the 'unreal' "—much as Don Essientes in Huysman's *Against the Grain* first collected artificial flowers that looked real and later on, real flowers that looked artificial.

KINGS OF HORROR (Fantasy Reader #6), by Arthur Machen and Robert W. Chambers, Krueger, $1, 77 pages

These 4-by-8-inch Fantasy-Reader booklets are a happy publishing idea. The short lines and column-size pages make for pleasant reading and some of the selections are excellent: #3 has Machen's novella "The Great God Pan" and #4 Chamber's "Maker of Moons." This one comprises the former's "The Inmost Light," in which, as in "Pan," female sensuousness is presented as an ultimate, evilly beautiful horror—a ridiculous concept which nevertheless fits perfectly with Victorian prudery and the panic element in all sex, and two of the latter's tales: "The Mask," a frothy trifle in which the theme of beautiful - woman - turned - to - stone - by - mad - scientist is given a miraculous happy ending, and "The Yellow Sign," where Chambers works a similar magic with nice, Trilby-type materials from Greenwich Village at the turn of the century: lovely Washington Square, willful and wealthy young artists, delightfully disolute actresses ("Have a cab at the stage door at eleven, Edith Carmichel, Metropolitan Theatre"), charmingly gamine models who slip out of and into Japanese robes, dance away to dress behind screens, ask one to button their blouses, smoke daring cigarettes, but also chew gum, revel at Coney Island, and are in the end movingly innocent, and over all the shadow of that banned best-seller *The King in Yellow*, which is driving a continent mad—really a more exciting-sounding book than the *Necronomicon*, when you get down to it. Chambers had the wit to realize that all ultimate horrors ought to be very beautiful—perhaps even, to borrow Beatrice Lillie's quip about the best things in life, "very expensive."

THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES READER, edited by Peter Haining, Doubleday, 1975, $7.95.

This anthologist has hit on the catchy idea of assembling fantasies about old geographical and archeological matters (Easter Island, Stonehenge, Atlantis, Mu, etc.), accompanying each tale with a sizable introduction to its topic, so that it might be considered a companion volume to Sprague and Catherine de Camp's *Citadels of Mystery* (recently reviewed) and his *Lost Continents*, except that Haining is just a bit too credulous about "ancient mysteries" in his introduction. A moderate tolerance for crackpot theories would be inevitable in a book of this sort, though I'm sure Asimov and Fred Hoyle are uncomfortable at being lumped with Velikovsky and von

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Daniken as "scientist-writers," but Haining goes too far when he describes the creaky old hollow-earth theory as a new idea "arrived at by a combination of man's increased reasoning power and the new scientific and technological equipment now at his command." And I cannot imagine *where* he got the idea that "the American aviator Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd" (first man to fly over both poles back in the 1920's) was a champion of that same hollow-earth hypothesis and that "Rear Admiral Byrd and his theories received little serious attention," and that his insistences "fell on deaf ears." I never heard a thing, myself—in fact, I get the impression that these days the country cousins are beginning to turn up on the east bank of the Atlantic Ocean.

But for all that, there are some interesting and well-chosen tales in this book. Geoffrey Household's "The Lost Continent" is a neat and cleverly inconclusive treatment of the Atlantis theme, while Leslie Charteris' "The Convenient Monster" does as well by the Loch Ness creature.

Lafcadio Hearn's "The Mound Builders" and "A New God was Born" by B. Traven (the mysterious writer who dwelt in Mexico) are not stories but articles, the one windy, the other amusingly informative.

Bulwer-Lytton's "The Coming Race" is a section of his 1871 novel (which fascinated Hitler, it seems) about underground supermen (and women, superior in physical strength and mental subtlety) and master of a force called *vril*, which seems to be a combination of atomic energey and Wilhelm Reich's *orgone*, but by which the author seems to have meant only electricity. (In the 1920's there was a quack radiation therapy based on a supposed *vril* source, an instance of fiction becoming fact—for profit!)

Sax Rohmer's "The Valley of the Sorceress" (Queen Hatshepsut) and C. A. Smith's "An Offering to the Moon" (Mu) creak a bit, while Robert Bloch's "The Bald-Headed Mirage" (Easter Island on another planet) sounds as if it had been written to storify an AMAZING cover.

William Sambrot's "Creatures of the Snows" (Abominable Snowmen) is tolerable *Saturday Evening Post*, while Sturgeon's "The Cave of History" (Flying Saucers) is his "The Sky was Full of Ships."

And then there are some more-or-less classics: Poe's "Ms. Found in a Bottle" (legitimately hollow-earth stuff), Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" (Mu again, really), Arthur Machen's "The Shining Pyramid" (the fairies identified as a dwarfish, pre-Celtic cavefolk, who in this story lure off a country girl and in a fiery ceremony render her "no longer fit for earth"), A. Merritt's "The Moon Pool" (Nan-Matal, Venice of the Pacific, Mu still once more)—

Pause with that last one and recollect Machen's "The Inmost Light" from *Kings of Horror*, for those two tales strike me as demonstrating something very interesting about the supernatural horror story, as written in the early century (Machen's in 1894, Merritt's in 1918): that there was a strong, though disguised, sexual element in it. Remember, "The Moon Pool" had a tremendous vogue, Lovecraft thought it one of the greatest weird stories of all times; it was later expanded into a novel which Lovecraft did not approve.

In both stories the ultimate horror is inflicted on a beautiful young bride, wife of an older man—Machen's a doctor with a secret interest in the occult, Merritt's an archeologist investigating an ancient civilization with mysterious powers—with the horror coming as a result of the husband's desire to explore a dangerous and mysterious area of experience.

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Both women are hesitant to do this, but overcome their scruples in the end. Merritt's Edith says, "David, would you be very, very disappointed if we went from here—without trying to find out any more about it—would you?" While of Machen's Agnes, her husband says, "One night my wife consented to what I asked of her, consented with the tears running down her beautiful face, and hot shame flushing red over her neck and breast, consented to undergo this for me."

In both stories the ultimate horror—and the mark it leaves on its victim—is a mingling of dread and ecstacy. Merritt: "A world of terror, whose unknown joy is its greatest terror of all," "They (certain musical sounds) frighten me half to death, and, at the same time, they make me feel as though some enormous rapture was just around the corner," "infinitely caressing, infinitely cruel" and " . . . caught a glimpse of Edith's face, disappearing; her eyes stared up at me filled with supernal ecstacy and horror." In "The Inmost Light" the narrator glimpses the beautiful Agnes through a window: "It was the face of a woman, and yet it was not human," " . . . a lust that cannot be satiated and a fire that is unquenchable . . . " " . . . a mist of flowing yellow hair, as it were an aureole of glory around the face of a satyr."

And in both stories the ultimate horror also takes the form of a beautiful radiance sounding to the modern reader like a psychedelic trip. In Machen it is " . . . a splendid jewel . . . and within it shone the blue of far skies, and the green of the sea by the shore, and the red of the ruby, and deep violet rays, and in the middle of all it seemed aflame as if a fountain of fire rose up, and fell, and rose again with sparks like stars for drops," while in Merritt it is the coruscating moon pool itself—"Upon it streamed seven shafts of radiance. One was the tender pink of the pearl; one of the aurora's green; a third a deadly white; the fourth the blue in mother-of-pearl; a shimmering column of pale amber; a beam of amethyst; a shaft of molten silver."

Now it strikes me that all this says, perhaps quite unconsciously, that sexual experience, though frightening, is incredibly beautiful and that a good woman, though scared half to death and deeply shocked, enjoys it even though she's not supposed to. Far fetched? Certainly the matching fountains, coruscations, and spectra are intriguing.

—Fritz Leiber

White Wizard (cont. from page 89)

26. *Ibid.* (Houghton Mifflin), p. 308; (Ballantine), p. 381.

27. M. Z. Bradley: *Men, Halflings and Hero Worship* (T-K Graphics, 1973), p. 9.

28. Reilly, in Isaacs & Zimbardo, pp. 83, 130.

29. Fuller *et al.*, p. 141.

30. *The Hobbit* (Houghton Mifflin), p. 315; *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Houghton Mifflin), p. 69.

31. Plato: *The Republic* II, 359; *The Prose Edda*, pp. 111-15.

32. J. B. Cabell: *Jurgen* (1922), p. 332.

—L. Sprague de Camp

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Editorial (cont. from page 4)
equently published several more of is books, including *The Weirwoods* 1967), *Moondust* (1968), and *The Dolphin and the Deep* (1968), which ontained the classic medieval fantasy, "The Mamor of Roses," which was lso a Hugo nominee following its ini- ial appearance in *F&SF*.

"In 1973 Swann won the Phoenix Award at the DeepSouthCon in New Orleans for his novel, *Wolfwinter* Ballantine, 1972).

"Swann's first bout with cancer ame four years ago, although at the ime doctors felt that the disease had een overcome. From that experience ame *How Are the Mighty Fallen* DAW, 1974), a Biblical fantasy based n the story of David and Jonathan. Critical reaction was favorable, and Theodore Sturgeon, writing in the New York *Times*, said, 'He writes plissfully and beautifully separated rom trend and fashion; he writes his own golden thing his own way. . . . I an see his works capturing some oungster today as the timeless eauty of William Morris enchanted ne too many years ago.'

"Swann never married, and in a re- ent interview he said, 'Some people, I think, are not meant to marry. They re meant to write. To be a writer, ou have to be alone a great deal. My ne and only engagement was a disas- er. She was jealous of my writing. With me, it was either writing or the oman, and I chose the former.'

"Ironically, 1976 will see publica- ion of more of Swann's work than any ther year. *The Minikins of Yam*, a antasy with an Egyptian setting, was ublished by DAW in March; *Lady of he Bees*, a novel-length version of Where is the Bird of Fire?', was is- ued by Ace in May, although Swann ever saw the published book; *Tour- ament of Thorns*, an expanded ver- ion of 'The Manor of Roses', will be ublished by Ace in July; *The Gods Abide*, in which Swann linked his two avorite locales, the Mediterranean nd ancient Britain, will appear from DAW in November; a still-untitled novel, a 'prequel' to *Day of the Minotaur* and *The Forest of Forever*, will be published in FANTASTIC; and finally Swann's version of the story of Dido and Anaeas, *Queens Walk in the Dusk*, which he finished from his hospital bed, will see print this summer from publisher Richard Garrison as a deluxe hardcover edition illustrated by Jeff Jones.

"In the introduction to a French edition of one of his books was written: 'Instead of the macrocosm he prefers the microcosm; to an alien planet, an isolated forest; to grizzlies, teddy bears.' This, I think, aptly characterizes the viewpoint of Swann's fiction. His was a gentle world, peopled by minotaurs, dryads, fauns, and other pre-humans who often found themselves in reluctant conflict with the encroaching civilization. There was no question as to where the author's sympathies were."

With Swann's passing we have clearly lost a major and quite individual voice in fantasy. He will be missed.

THE GOR CONTROVERSY: I introduced a major topic of discussion among the readers of this magazine when I criticized John Norman's *Marauders of Gor* here more than a year ago—and that controversy has fueled the letter column ever since. But by now I think most of you have had the chance to have your say, and I'd like to see the topic dropped in favor of fresher ones. With that in mind, then, I'd like to recommend the fifth issue of *Kolvir*, a fanzine published by the Amber Society of Baltimore, to those of you who want the Final Word on the subject of Gor. *Kolvir* is devoted to fantasy, and in the fifth issue (Spring, 1976) Gil Fitzgerald writes an excellent essay, entitled "The Rapist as Hero," in which she examines the sado-masochistic themes which distinguish the Gor novels from their more run-of-the-mill competi-

(cont. on page 130)

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Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According to You, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046.*

Dear Ted:

In reviewing my sketch of Robert E. Howard (FANTASTIC, Aug. 1976, p. 116), my esteemed colleague Fritz Leiber says I "rather understandably sympathize more with Howard" than with H. P. Lovecraft. Since my writings about Howard and Lovecraft have incited comment, some accusing me of undue partiality for or against one or the other, perhaps you will let me expand on Fritz's statement.

Since I never knew either man, any sentiments that I could have towards either is not for the real man but for a mental construct, concept, or image, which I have built up by reading things by and about them and talking with people who knew them. The same applies to anyone's feelings towards a man he had heard of but never met, such as a historical figure. Thus no modern man can love or hate the real Oliver Cromwell. All he can do is react to the concept he builds up by reading of Cromwell. This picture may or may not be accurate. I may hear of contemporary, form a mental picture of him, and find when I meet him that he is quite different from what I expected.

Of course, the more I investigate him, the less discrepancy there is likely to be; but even when one knows a person intimately for years, one never knows all about him. I have investigated Howard and Lovecraft enough to have, I think, a good idea of what they were like—or as good an idea as one can form at second hand—but there is always a chance that some new datum may change my picture.

With that caveat out of the way, I think I *sympathize* rather more with Lovecraft, because he had qualities that, in my youth, I shared with him but did not admire. I perhaps *admire* Howard a little more, because he had qualities that I esteemed but did not possess. That I am also aware of their faults, anyone who has read my writings about them knows.

What could have happened if I had met either, none knows, since one cannot predict how one will get along with another. Whether I should have liked either, and vice versa, is as unknowable as the name of King Kull's favorite boarhound. I only wish I had had a chance to find out.

Speaking of Kull, there is a story as to why I failed to discover Howard until 1950. In 1930, when I was a new Caltech graduate, I picked up a copy of the November *Weird Tales*, with "Kings of the Night." This story brings Kull and Bran Mak Morn together by time travel. The tale, I saw, recounted a battle between Romans and Britons. The first sentence that caught my eye described a Roman officer's being dragged behind his horse by his foot, caught in the stirrup.

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Even then, I knew that in Classical Roman times, the stirrup had not yet been invented. Phooey! I said; this fellow doesn't know what he's talking about. So I put the magazine back on its rack and did not become fully aware of Howard until twenty years later.

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP
Villanova, Pa. 19085

Dear Mr. White:

I would like to respond to the letter by Mr. Anthony Sandor printed in the May 1976 issue of FANTASTIC. Your reply was perceptive and apt, but I think that the seriousness of Mr. Sandor's misconceptions justifies further comment. The distinction he makes between the "real world" and the world of fiction is inadequate. If he reflects on the question for a moment he will realize that the realm of everyday experience has no rigid boundries, nor a fixed and graspable structure. The world appears to be the interaction of an infinite and turbulent mass of sensations with the thoughts, values, and feelings of the human mind. When examined closely, even the most "humdrum" life is confusing and contradictory, an unstable compound of external event and internal interpretation. Experience seems to resemble a stream we swim in more than the concrete and dreary architecture we inhabit, and wish to escape from, as Mr. Sandor implies.

Good fiction, and by that I mean writing which manifests the great and ancient art of storytelling, does not repeat the real world because its characteristics are precisely those which our experience usually lacks: order, control, consistency, lucidity, purpose. This list could be extended indefinitely and applies to both "mainstream" and fantastic fiction. It is into this world of art we wish to escape from the other world of uncertainty and chaos, whatever type of fiction we choose to read, whether we realize it or not. All good fiction is sorcery. We return from the magical and pleasurable journey of reading, even if it has deposited us at the "humdrum destinations" of marriage or death, to our daily lives refreshed, perhaps changed a little, with new ideas and new ways of perceiving the world.

The intolerance expressed in Mr. Sandor's letter disturbs me for many reasons, one of which is that it is with the reverse of his arguments that some condescending advocates of "mainstream" fiction attack the literature of fantasy as trivial and irrelevant. Life is too short and altogether nasty enough without clouding the pleasure of literature with enmity.

I have only recently begun reading FANTASTIC, with great pleasure I must say, and my regret for what I have been missing leads me to ask if recent back issues are available.

MICHAEL MCNIERNEY
2342 Storm Street
Ames, Iowa, 50010

Most back issues are available from the Publisher—a few, such as our August, 1972, issue (not only our 20th Anniversary issue, but one which featured a Conan story and a Conan cover by Jeff Jones) are sold out and are now collector's items.—TW

Ted:

The main reason I subscribe to your zines is the features; and in that regard, I would rather see topics discussed that have more to do with the field as a whole than continued (you should pardon the expression) flogging of the Gor issue. Nonetheless, I realize that both magazines are in deep circulation trouble, and that Gor has generated a high mail volume. If the survival of FANTASTIC is at stake, by all means keep it up.

A possible way to get the best of both worlds is to expand the discussion from the Gor base. Granted that we'll all defend to the death everyone's legal right to write and pub-

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lish anything, ought writers, editors and publishers to consider the moral, social and psychiatric implications of the themes of fantasy in deciding what stories will see print? As a start, should fiction that depicts women as at best objects to be owned, more often worthless, and most often of all the root of all evil, be rejected as pernicious by editors and critics?

If the answer is yes, then much if not most heroic fiction must fall under the interdict. We can start with the bible (Eve and the apple), Homer (the goddesses contesting the golden apple, and Helen) and Malory's Arthurian cycle (Guinevere's infidelity). In each of these cases, the central action of the story would never have happened without female perfidy and pettyness. The same thread of misogyny runs through the pages of FANTASTIC (as in "People of the Dragon").

If the theme *is* acceptable, the addition of the equally if not better established s&s maxim of beating up on those who do you wrong leads logically to Gor. Methinks the reason you do protest so much is that Norman has held a mirror up to much of what you publish, and you don't like what you see in it. His offense apparently lies in his frankness—he has touched a sensitive nerve.

ERWIN S. STRAUSS
9909 Good Luck Road, T2
Lanham, MD 20801

You're right that Gor, as an issue, is about flogged out (see the conclusion of my editorial this issue). As for the question of moral considerations, this was, of course, more the rule than the exception until this century—fiction was considered dangerous for its readers unless it made "proper" moral points. In the Twentieth Century we began considering fiction on existential grounds: judging it not by its conformity to the morals of the time, but by its own success within its own terms. Have we gone too far in doing so? An intriguing point, and one which I'll leave for others to argue. However, it is one thing to build a story upon the "perfidity" of one *female (or, for that matter, male), and another to impute this perfidity to* all *members of that sex. I don't believe this distinction should be overlooked.*—TW

Dear Mr. White,

First, let me compliment you on the August FANTASTIC (and offer my condolences on your new quarterly schedule). By far the highlight of the issue was Avram Davidson's "Bloody Man," a great old-fashioned story of wandering and damned souls—a theme so old it was almost new, and eminently capable of evoking in the reader the authentic shudder. And the unexpected identity of the Bloody Man was beautiful. (Speaking of which adjective, compliment Steve Fabian on that extremely tasteful cover for the story). I confess that I don't always like Davidson's writings—I disliked his Enquiries of Doctor Esterhazy, for instance, while I very much liked his Ursus of Ultima Thule stories. (Try to talk him into writing the sequels to his Ace Special, *The Island Under the Earth*—the best thing he ever did, despite the lousy ending). The second best story was Ova Hamlet's "God of the Naked Unicorn"—the only story by Hamlet that I have ever unreservedly liked. (I blush to confess that I have only just realized that Hamlet is to Richard Lupoff what Cordwainer Bird is to Harlan Ellison). Anyway, being a pulp fan (I bought Farmer's bio of Doc Savage in hardback in '73) it was delightful to see all of the old heroes together versus *that* villain. The third best was Lin Carter's finishing of Clark Ashton Smith's "The Stairs in the Crypt"—actually the reason I bought the issue. Despite my disliking of Carter's solo writings (with the sole exception of *The Man Who Loved Mars*) he was very skillful in preserving that mood of Smith's—so much so

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that I am in some puzzlement as to where one ended and the other began. The other stories, although competently done, don't stick in my mind like the first three.

Secondly, about the Gor novels—

I remember picking up the first Gor novel years ago, and having mixed feelings about it. The world was visualized rather well, and in many ways wasn't just another Barsoom. At times Norman could write very well, catching a feeling for the exotic and unearthly that many of the psuedo-John Carter books don't. On the other hand, two things definitely bothered me about it—one, the fact those giant falcon-steeds Cabot rode wouldn't be able to get off the ground in real life, and the part that has annoyed everyone else—the fact that the women were total slaves save a very few Free Women, and further, that Norman implied this was woman's more natural, more subconsciously desired state, to serve the master man. This was at a time when I had barely heard of Feminism, having an impression from an article in an underground paper that it was a movement solely for lesbians—but even at that time I remember thinking about Norman, "This guy's crazy when it comes to writing about women." I winced every time Norman described the slave-collars the women wore. I marked down the Gor book as uneven, but possibly worth risking some more money on the succeeding books.

At this time (aside from the slave-state of women, which was enough) there was very little sadism. Cabot was a monogamic good-guy looking for his princess, although without the style of John Carter. It was not great science/fantasy, about on the level of Akers' Scorpio novels nowadays, a little superior to Carter's Callisto novels (too much of an imitation of Burroughs for my taste) and a little inferior to Carter's Green Star novels.

I bought the next few novels, thinking surely Cabot would help the women throw off the yoke of Gorean slavery, as John Carter destroyed the Cult of Issus. Such was not the case, sadly. As time went on, it began to inch more and more toward the sadistic, Cabot became less likable. There were still an occasional lovely touch—the city described in the opening pages of *Priest-Kings of Gor*, the Priest-Kings themselves, the culture of the caravans of Gor. But they were becoming less and less frequent. My last Gor novel was, I believe, the sixth of the series—*Pirates of Gor*. (I have since thrown my Gor novels away, so I am not sure it is the sixth). In this, Cabot is both using and being used by women with little trace of liking or affection, simply for copulation or subservience. At this point, I gave up on Cabot and the whole series. It was edging more and more to the sadistic. I preserved the first few novels for a little while, but as the later novels denigrated, I became a little ashamed to have stuff associated with those later novels on my shelves, and threw them away.

It's too bad. The first novel was flawed, but a competent bit of the sword-and-planet John Carter genre. Norman had the potential to develop Gor into a much more complete world, such as Norton's Witch World or Bradley's Darkover (although of course it never had the potential to become as visualized a world as Herbert's Dune or LeGuin's Winter). Instead, it became repetitive, self-indulgent and benumbed with violence and sadism. Perhaps he named it better than we knew—"Gore" indeed.

Since neither you nor Fritz Leiber seemed to have followed the series from the beginning, I thought the description of the gradual disillusionment of an early reader would be interesting. And I applaud your decision not to put any of his novels into FANTASTIC.

AL SCHROEDER III

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2207 Old Hickory Blvd.
Nashville, Tenn. 37215

Dear Mr. White;

The August FANTASTIC lived up to the editorial, it did have a wide variety of fantasy, most of it quite good, but was "New-Way-Groovers Stew" fantasy? If fantasy is the willing suspension of disbelief, did it qualify? (It was a good well-written story, I just wonder what it is doing in your magazine.) The setting is the mid-sixties, which is not very strange, the two main characters are a middle aged homosexual and a younger lesbian, and they are friends, that is improbable, but not fantastic. The story ends talking of canniblism, canniblism may be horrible, along with murder which is also implied, but it exists and quite probably there exist some maniacs in N. America who do both.

Fantasy exists where the mind says no, this could never happen. Other improbable stories, like s-f, have to have a degree of possiblity, so that the mind says "well under those circumstances this could happen." Fiction such as The Foundation Trilolgy fulfills this by being guided by history, and so having probability. *The Lord of the Rings* with no attempt at justifacation does not, so the mind has to suspend disbeleif.

Often the mind is not consistant, and where something is too discusting, but still possible—like some of Hitchcock's work—the mind calls it fantasy.

It doesn't even have to be disgusting, Robert E. Howard tried to justify the Conan stories by placing them in the far past, giving them a possiblity of actually having happened, but almost everyone classifies them as fantasy in their minds because the explanation does not convince them that the events could possibly have happened.

You probably know as well as anyone what the various definitions of fantasy are, but to me it seems that I do not have to suspend disbelief to read "New-Way-Groovers Stew," nor was it overly creepy or disgusting to me, and the setting and happenings seemed possible to me. I'll bet most readers agree that to them, it wasn't fantasy.

Stephen Fabian's cover was striking and perfect, and his interior work set off the stories well. Your editorial put Gor in its proper place, as (in the last few books at least) poorly written pornography—perhaps not poorly written by pornographic standards.

"Bloody Man" by Avram Davidson took sometime in getting somewhere, but it was worth the wait.

"The God of the Naked Unicorn" was the first story by Ova Hamlet that I have read, and it lived up to my expectations, it was easily the best novelet of the issue, and I would like to read a lot more of her?.

I tried to think of something to criticize or praise in "Algy" but I could do neither, it was neither great or bad throughout.

"The Stairs in the Crypt" was a perfect example of a story that makes readers tremble with loathing, just by describing horrid and revolting things. Lin Carter does it well and it is the best short story of the magazine.

I have not read "Fugitives in Winter" by Dennis More, and without it his "The Atheling's Wife" did not seem to stand up, probably after I have read more of the series I will think more of it.

"Ocean" was fine work, although there is not enough in it to get excited over.

Judging from the August issue, FANTASTIC does deserve to go back to bimonthly publication, three months until the next FANTASTIC? I don't think I'll be able to stand it.

DUNCAN THORNTON
609 Goulding St.,
Winnipeg, Man., R3G 2S3, Canada

All fiction requires the reader's willing suspension of disbelief. Fantasy dif-

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fers from mundane fiction in that the reader must make a more conscious effort to achieve that suspension of disbelief. Fantasy is itself a broad spectrum of literature which includes many differing subtypes within it. I considered "New-Way-Groovers Stew" fantasy, in any case, and the "probability of its having actually occurred did not enter seriously into my consideration.—TW

Dear Mr. White,

I just received the August number of FANTASTIC, and as usual, read the lettercol, your editorial, and Leiber's great book reviews, though not in that order. I want to compliment Fabian on his beautiful and haunting cover, though this is surely carrying coals to Newcastle. What a pity we don't have the good old pulp format, to get a size cover to really get our teeth into! I wonder if many other people feel, as I do, that the digests of today will be the sought-after collector's items of tomorrow. To this end, I save all my SF and Fantasy zines in mint condition (nobody here reads 'em but me) in precarious stacks in my extra house, which is full of the gleanings of 42 years of mad collecting.

Look, I dunno if you expected a response to your editorial, though I suspect you do. FANTASTIC and AMAZING are both fine zines and fanzines with beautiful covers and inside illos, after all, you can't beat Fabian, can you? Even the *Locus* poll rates him second place! Charlie Brown is always fearing for your continued existence. I wonder, if I told every visitor to my home, "I feel sorry for poor old Banker Smith, some folks think he is wealthy, but I worry about him lately," would I be trying to destroy him in the community, which is what our group is, a community, right? At least that is how I feel about it.

I was sort of hurt that you announced to the "in group" of your intention to go to quarterly publication, long before you told your long-suffering subscribers. I got the news from *Locus* weeks ago, and *Locus* comes late, unless one feels one can afford paying extra for First Class. Not to fault *Locus*, it's the best. When I got the notice that my subs to AMAZING-FANTASTIC had expired, and there was no mention of the quarterly aspect, I renewed, but with a sort of hurt surprise. We aren't as dumb as all that, out here in Outlandia. Some of us keep up as best we can, being unable to attend conventions, etc. we like to know what's going on.

I'm going to write a note to Deborah Paskavich over in Illinois and let her know she isn't all alone in the world. I know of one SF fan around here namely me—and one S&S fan (not me especially!) in this Missouri area away from the cities. I was in stores in Chillicothe, Mo., a town of 13,000 more or less, and last week I saw the 50th Anniversary AMAZING, which I thought would be an immediate sellout, going begging on newsstands. Of course there is no college in Chillicothe, which I would consider an important factor.

"Our Gang Antiques and Nostalgia" Box 261, Brookfield, Mo. 64628, has quite a few back numbers of AMAZING pulps from the '40s. They are not mint, being "good" or fair condition but covers and contents complete. No, I don't have a financial interest, just trying to help. I may buy them myself if Mark Kirkpatrick doesn't try to hold me up.

I don't know why in the Hell your circulation is slipping. I rate you far superior to *Analog*, for example, and as for *Galaxy*, who can find it? It is easier to lay out a buck at a time for a zine on the newsstand than it is to come up with $9 or $10 at once for a subscription, if you read as voraciously as I do, but the White mags are the ones I wouldn't risk missing. I take a chance on *Analog* and *Galaxy*. F&SF is the only SF digest other than your zines, that I would

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never risk missing. I buy all zines in the genre, as they come out, including *Odyssey*, which was a letdown in #2, at least to me. I prefer short stories and novellas to lengthy stories. If you buy the zine and the long novel fails to grab your interest, you have shot a buck down the tube and it is gone forever, fit only to pad your archives or your arches.

Guess that's all I had on my mind. There are people out here who appreciate your product. Oh yeh! About this porno thing, I enjoyed *Captives of Gor* and confess I like sex, s-m, all that, though I am too old to rush out and make a slave out of one of the nubiles of the neighborhood, it is an idea, isn't it? Hoo, Boy! I am totally against censorship, and I know you are too. You don't have to be afraid to knock something you don't like. I was titillated by *Dhalgren*, to name a prime example of popular porn, and I thought it had little redeeming social value. Who needs social value? Who needs another *Dhalgren*? Let it be the classic it surely will be. I wonder if you will ever have a letter column devoted to discussing *Dhalgren*? Tune in tomorrow!

BRUCE MOFFITT
Box 210
Purdin, Mo. 64674

I don't decide the publication schedule of this magazine, nor have I any hand in the subscription-renewal notices. I learned that we would be on a quarterly schedule shortly before I publicly announced that fact at this year's Lunacon in New York City; at about the same time I wrote last issue's editorial, in which I shared the sad news with the rest of you. I can't see that I favored any "in group" in doing this; in any case, your subscription is for a certain number of issues, not for a specific length of time, *so you've lost nothing in our switch from bimonthly to quarterly. It's hard to find many stf magazines these days—ours included. (I've yet to see* Odyssey *on sale anywhere in the Washington, D.C. area, for example.) But that's an old story, isn't it?*—TW

Forest of Andred (cont. from page 117)

neck. 'Aye,' he agreed. 'And I freed a brave lady from an arrogant cruel master, slew a spider slavering venom, and gave the gift of words to a mute.' He looked at Kev, lying on his belly along a great tree-limb above them. 'But that last is an achievement that sours in my mouth, somehow. What use will he find for them?'

He knew that Kev had at most a few more years in him. He'd shown that he was more than an animal, but it was too late for him to make a man. And yet—if he knew he was pitied, he might honestly wonder why.

—DENNIS MORE

Editorial (cont. from page 123)

tion.

Quite obviously I'm in fundamental agreement with Fitzgerald, and her summation—based on a thorough reading of all the Gor novels—is well informed and buttressed with relevant quotes. *Kolvir* welcomes letters of comment, so those of you who maintain that the Gor novels are just good clean fun can argue with Fitzgerald there, perhaps freeing our letters pages for newer topics of discussion. (*Kolvir* costs 50¢ a copy and can be obtained from The Amber Society, c/o HOPSFA, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md. 21218.)

FINALLY, a note of apology to both Dave Bischoff and Bill Nabors and those of you who searched for their stories last issue, after reading my commendation of them in my editorial. As it happens, we miscalculated page-lengths and had to hold those two stories back for this issue, where, I hope, you'll find and enjoy them.

—TED WHITE

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